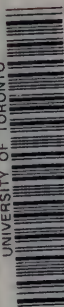


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THE NAIAD

BY
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TRANSLATED BY

KATHERINE BERRY DI ZÉREGA



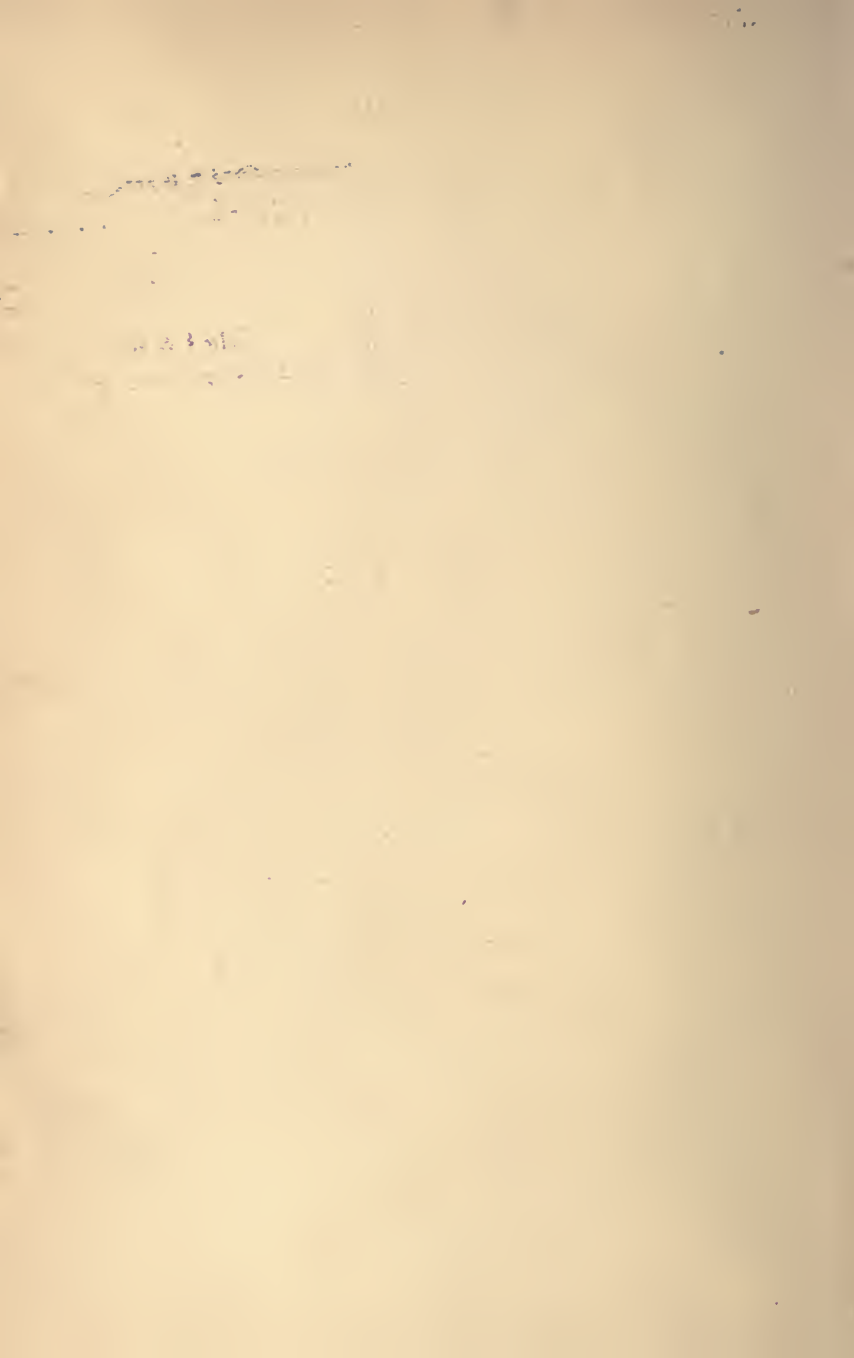
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THE NAIAD

A GHOST STORY

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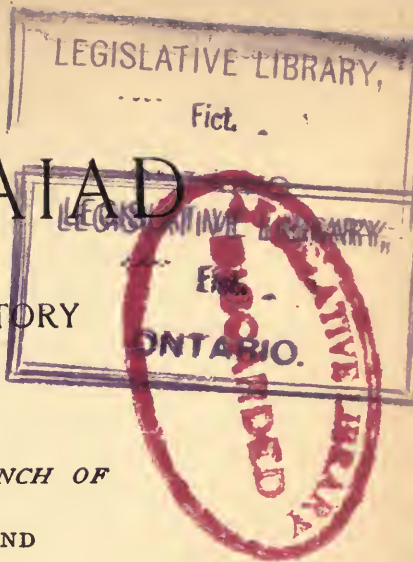
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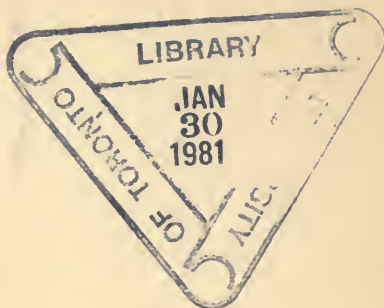
BY

KATHERINE BERRY DI ZÉRÉGA



F. TENNYSON NEELY,
PUBLISHER,
LONDON. NEW YORK.





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TO THE LATE

Lady Frankland

THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

BY HER

MOTHER

PREFACE.

WHEN years ago the author of this volume read, with delight, the story in the original, she then decided to translate it, in order that others (unfamiliar with the language) might enjoy a similar pleasure; the work of publication, hardly begun, was interrupted by the illness and sudden death of her only daughter, and to one who in so many ways resembled the heroine of this sketch, this book is now dedicated.

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THE NAIAD.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE LOAVES.

CHARGED by my father with a very delicate mission, I repaired, towards the end of May, 1788, to the château of Ionis, situated a dozen leagues distant, in the lands lying between Angers and Saumur. I was twenty-two, and already practising the profession of lawyer, for which I experienced but slight inclination, although neither the study of business nor of argument had presented serious difficulties to me. Taking my youth into consideration, I was not esteemed without talent, and the standing of my father, a lawyer renowned in the locality, assured me a brilliant patronage in the future, in return for any paltry efforts I might make to be worthy of replacing him. But I would have preferred literature, a more dreamy life, a more independent and more individual use of my faculties, a responsibility less submissive to the passions and interests of others. As my family was well off, and I an only son, greatly spoiled and petted, I might have chosen my own career, but I would have thus afflicted my father, who took pride in his ability to direct me

in the road which he had cleared in advance, and I loved him too tenderly to permit my instinct to outweigh his wishes.

It was a delightful evening in which I was finishing my ride on horseback through the woods that surrounded the ancient and magnificent castle of Ionis. I was well mounted, dressed *en cavalier*, with a species of elegance, and accompanied by a servant of whom I had not the slightest need, but whom my mother had conceived the innocent idea of giving me for the occasion, desiring that her son should present a proper appearance at the house of one of the most brilliant personages of our patronage.

The night was illuminated by the soft fire of its largest stars. A slight mist veiled the scintillations of those myriads of satellites that gleam like brilliant eyes on clear, cold evenings. This was a true summer sky, pure enough to be luminous and transparent, still sufficiently softened not to overwhelm one by its immeasurable wealth. It was, if I may so speak, one of those soft firmaments that permit one to think of earth, to admire the vaporous lines of narrow horizons, to breathe without disdain its atmosphere of flowers and herbage—in fine, to consider oneself as something in this immensity, and to forget that one is but an atom in the infinite.

In proportion as I approached the seigneurial park the wild perfumes of the forest were mingled with those of the lilacs and acacias, whose blooming heads leaned over the wall. Soon through the shrubbery I saw the windows of the manor gleaming behind their curtains of purple moire, divided by the dark cross-bars of the frame work. It was a magnificent castle

of the renaissance, a *chef-d'œuvre* of taste mingled with caprice, one of those dwellings where one is impressed by something indescribably ingenious and bold, which from the imagination of the architect seems to pass into one's own, and take possession of it, raising it above the usages and preoccupations of a positive world.

I confess that my heart beat fast in giving my name to the lackey commissioned to announce me. I had never seen Madame d'Ionis; she passed for one of the prettiest women in the country, was twenty-two, and had a husband who was neither handsome nor amiable, and who neglected her in order to travel. Her writing was charming, and she found means to show not only a great deal of sense, but still more cleverness in her business letters. Altogether she was a very fine character. This was all that I knew of her, and it was sufficient for me to dread appearing awkward or provincial. I grew pale on entering the salon. My first impression then was one of relief and pleasure, when I found myself in the presence of two stout and very ugly old women, one of whom, Madame the Dowager d'Ionis informed me that her daughter-in-law was at the house of her friends in the neighborhood, and probably would not return before the next day.

"You are welcome, all the same," added this matron. "We have a very friendly and grateful feeling for your father, and it appears that we stand in great need of his counsel, which you are without doubt charged to communicate to us."

"I came from him," I replied, "to talk over the affair with Madame d'Ionis."

"The Countess d'Ionis does in fact occupy herself

with business affairs," replied the dowager, rather coldly, as if to warn me that I had committed a blunder. "She understands it, she has a good head, and in the absence of my son, who is at Vienna, she is conducting this wearisome and interminable law-suit. You must not depend upon me to replace her, for I understand nothing about it, and all that I can do is to retain you until the countess' return, and offer you a supper, such as it may be, and a good bed."

Hereupon the old lady, who in spite of the little lesson she had given me, appeared a good enough woman, rang and gave orders for making me at home. I refused to eat anything, having taken care to do so on the road, and knowing that nothing is more annoying than to eat alone, and under the eyes of people with whom one happens to be totally unacquainted.

As my father had allowed me several days in which to execute my commission, I had nothing better to do, than to wait the return of my beautiful client; and I was, in the eyes of herself and family, a messenger of sufficient importance to be entitled to a very cordial hospitality. I did not then await a second invitation to remain in her house, although there was a very comfortable inn where persons of my condition went ordinarily to await the moment of consultation with "people of quality." Such was still the language of the provinces at this epoch, and it was necessary to appreciate these terms and their value, in order to maintain one's position without degradation and without impertinence in one's relations with the world. A *bourgeois*, and a philosopher (they did not yet say Democrat), I was not in the least convinced of the moral superiority of the nobility, and although they prided

themselves upon being philosophical, I knew it was necessary to humor their susceptibilities of etiquette and respect them, in order to be respected oneself. I displayed then a slight timidity with an air of sufficiently good style, having already seen at my father's house some specimens of all classes of society. The dowager appeared to perceive this, before the lapse of many minutes and no longer assumed an air of condescension in order to welcome, if not as an equal, at least as a friend the son of the family lawyer.

While she was conversing with me, as a woman with whom custom supplies the place of wit, I had the leisure to examine both her countenance and that of the other matron still stouter than she who, seated at some distance and filling in the back-ground of a piece of tapestry, never opened her lips and scarcely raised her eyes in my direction. She was dressed somewhat in the style of the dowager, in a dark silk gown with tight sleeves, and a black lace scarf, surmounting a white cap, tied under her chin. But it was not so fresh or clean, her hands were less white, although equally plump, her type coarser, although coarseness was very evident in the heavy features of the stout dowager of Ionis. In short I was no longer in doubt as to her condition of companion, when the dowager remarked apropos of my refusal to sup.

"No matter, Zéphyrine, we must not forget that M. Nivières is young, and that he may be hungry yet before going to sleep. Order a light supper to be served in his apartment."

The monumental Zéphyrine arose; she was as tall as she was stout. "And above all," observed her mistress, "do not let them forget the bread."

"The bread," said Zéphyrine, in a fine, husky little voice that offered a pleasing contrast to her statue. Then she repeated, "The bread!" with an intonation strongly marked by doubt and surprise.

"The loaves," replied the dowager with authority.

Zéphyrine seemed to hesitate an instant and went out, but her mistress recalled her immediately, and gave her this strange order—"Three loaves!"

Zéphyrine opened her mouth to answer, shrugged her shoulders slightly and disappeared.

"Three loaves!" I exclaimed in my turn. "But what kind of an appetite do you suppose I have, Madame la Comtesse?"

"Oh, that is nothing," said she, "They are quite small."

She was silent for a moment, I sought for some subject of conversation while awaiting the time when I might retire, when she appeared a prey to a certain perplexity, placed her hand on a bell, and stopped to say as if speaking to herself—"Still three loaves!"

"It is a great deal in fact," answered I, repressing a strong temptation to laugh. She looked at me in amazement, unconscious that she had spoken aloud.

"You speak of the law suit," said she, as if to make me forget her distraction, "it is a great deal that they claim. Do you think we will gain it?"

But she paid very little attention to my evasive answers, and rang emphatically. A servant came, she asked for Zéphyrine, who reappeared and in whose ear she whispered, after which she seemed relieved, and began to chat with me like a good-natured gossip, very ignorant, but benevolent and almost maternal, questioning me upon my tastes, my dispositions, my occupa-

tions and my pleasures. I made myself more of a child than I was in order to put her at her ease, for I soon remarked that she was one of those women of the great world who contrive to get along with the most mediocre intelligence, and who would prefer not to encounter a greater degree in others. On the whole she showed so much good nature that I was not greatly bored with her during the space of an hour, and that I did not await her permission to leave her with too much impatience.

A groom of the chambers conducted me to my apartment, for it was almost a complete suite, three decidedly handsome rooms, quite large and furnished in the Louis XV style, with a great deal of luxury. My own servant to whom my good mother had given his lesson, was in my bedroom, awaiting the honor of undressing me, in order to appear as well versed in his duties as the valets of great houses.

"This is all very well, my dear Baptiste," said I to him, when we were alone, "but thou canst go to sleep, I shall undress myself as I have been in the habit of doing all my life."

Baptiste bade me good-night, and left me. It was only ten o'clock. I had no desire to sleep so soon, so I set myself to examine the furniture and pictures in my room, when my eyes fell upon the repast which had been served near the fire-place, and the three loaves appeared before me in all their mysterious symmetry. They were passably large and arranged in the centre of the Japanese waiter in a pretty basket of old Saxony, with a handsome silver salt-cellar in the midst, and three damask napkins placed at intervals around it.

"What the deuce does this mean?" I asked myself, "and why has this vulgar accessory of my supper, the bread, tormented my aged hostess to such an extent?" "Why were three loaves so expressly ordered? Why not four! Why not ten? Since they take me for an ogre! Upon my word! This is really a bounteous feast, and here are some bottles of wine whose etiquettes promise well. But why three carafes of water? Here again it becomes mysterious and absurd. Does this good old countess imagine that I am triple, or that I carry two guests in my valise?" I was musing upon this enigma when some one knocked at the door of the ante-chamber.

"Come in," cried I, without moving, thinking that Baptiste had forgotten something. What was my surprise to behold the powerful Zéphyrine in her night cap, holding a candle in one hand and, with a finger placed upon her lips, advancing towards me on tip-toe as if she entertained the absurd idea of not letting the floor creak under her elephantine tread. I certainly grew paler than I had done in preparing to meet the youthful Madame d'Ionis. The spectacle of this voluminous apparition was truly appalling!

"Fear nothing, sir," said the good old maid ingeniously, as if she had divined my terror. "I come to explain about the extraordinary—the three carafes, and the three loaves."

"Ah! willingly," answered I, offering her an arm-chair, "I was really considerably perplexed."

"As housekeeper," said Zéphyrine, refusing to be seated and still holding her candle, "I should be very much mortified if monsieur imagined that I wished to perpetrate a poor joke. I would not permit myself—and

still I come to ask monsieur to connive at it, so that my mistress may not be displeased."

"Go on, Mademoiselle Zéphyrine, I am not of a disposition to be vexed at a joke, above all, when it is an amusing one."

"Oh! *mon Dieu*, no, sir, there is nothing amusing about it, but neither is there anything disagreeable. It is only this, madame the dowager countess is very—her head is very—." Zéphyrine stopped short; she either loved or feared the dowager and could not make up her mind to criticise her. Her embarrassment was comical, for it showed itself in a childish smile curling around the corners of a decidedly small and toothless mouth which caused her round, chubby face, minus forehead and chin, to appear still larger. You might have mistaken it for the full moon grimacing as it is represented on almanacs. Her breathless little voice, and her peculiar lisp had the effect of causing her to appear so extraordinary that I did not dare to look her in the face for fear of losing my countenance.

"Let me see," said I, endeavoring to encourage her in her revelations, "madame the dowager countess is something of a tease; she likes to amuse herself at the expense of others!"

"No, sir, no indeed. She does it in perfect good faith; she believes, she imagines"—I sought in vain for what the countess might imagine, when Zéphyrine added with an effort—"In fact, sir, my poor mistress believes in spirits!"

"Well, granted," I replied. "She is not the only person of her sex and age who entertains the same belief; and, it certainly does harm to no one."

"But it sometimes causes evil to those who fear

them, and if monsieur should be afraid of anything in this apartment, I can assure him that nothing ever reappears here."

"So much the worse, I would have been very pleased to see something supernatural. Ghosts are part of all old manors and this one is so handsome that I would only have imagined very agreeable phantoms."

"Really, monsieur has then heard something spoken of?"

"In regard to this castle and this apartment, never. I am waiting for you to tell me about it."

"Well, monsieur, this is the story: In the year—I can't remember—but it was in the reign of Henri II, monsieur must know better than I when that was, there lived here three young ladies of the d'Ionis family, beautiful as the day, and so amiable that they were adored by every body. A wicked court lady who was jealous of them, and of the youngest in particular, caused some poison to be placed in the water of a fountain from which they drank and which was used in making their bread. All three died the same night, and as they pretend to say, in the room where we now are. But this is not by any means certain and no one ever imagined such a thing until lately. To be sure they were in the habit of telling a story in the country of three white ladies who had shown themselves for a long time in the castle and in the gardens; but it was so old that no one thought of it any more, and no one believed it, when one of the friends of the family, M. l'abbe de Lamyre, who is an *esprit gai* and a good talker, having slept in this room, dreamed or pretended to have dreamed of three green ladies who had appeared and prophesied before him. And as he saw that his

dream interested madame the dowager, and diverted the young countess, her daughter-in-law, he invented whatever he pleased and made his ghosts talk according to his fancy so well, that madame the dowager is persuaded that the future of the family and that of the law suit, which is tormenting M. le comte, might be revealed by causing these phantoms to reappear and speak. But, as all the persons who have lodged here have seen nothing at all, and have simply laughed at her, she has resolved to put only those here who not having been forewarned would not think of inventing apparitions or of concealing those that they might have seen. This is why she has ordered you to be put in this room without saying anything to you, but as madame is not very—clever, perhaps, she has not been able to keep herself from speaking to me of the three loaves in your presence.”

“To be sure, the three loaves and the three carafes have given me some subject of thought. Nevertheless, I confess that absolutely I can discover no connection whatever.”

“Oh, yes, monsieur, the three ladies of the time of Henri II were poisoned by bread and water.”

“There I see the connection very plainly, but I do not understand how this offering, if it is one, should be agreeable to them. What do you think of it yourself?”

“I think wherever their souls may be they neither know nor care anything about it,” said Zéphyrine with an air of superior modesty. “But you ought to learn how these ideas were suggested to my good old mistress. I bring you the manuscript that Madame d’Ionis, her daughter-in-law, Madame Caroline as we call her

here, has herself unearthed by means of directions given in some old scribblings found in the archives of the family. This perusal will interest you more than my conversation, and I am going to wish you good evening after having preferred a little petition, however."

"With all my heart, my dear young lady, what can I do for you?"

"Do not tell any one in the world, unless Madame Caroline, who will not mind, that I have forewarned you, for madame the dowager would scold me, and would trust me no longer."

"I promise, and what must I say to-morrow if I am questioned in regard to my dreams?"

"Ah! that, monsieur, is a case in which you must have the kindness to invent something, a dream without sense or connection, whatever you please, provided it includes the three young ladies, otherwise madame the dowager will be like a soul in torment, and will accuse me of not putting the loaves, and carafes and salt-cellar in their places, or rather that I have warned you, and that your incredulity has prevented the ghosts from making their appearance. She is convinced of these ladies' bad temper and of their refusal to show themselves to those who ridicule them beforehand, were it only in their thoughts."

Left alone, after having promised Zéphyrine to lend myself to the fancy of her mistress, I opened and read the manuscript of which I shall only relate the circumstances relative to my story. That of the d'Ionis, young ladies appeared to me purely legendary, recounted by Madame d'Ionis on the faith of documents of slender authenticity, which she herself criticised in

that light and mocking strain which was the fashion of the day. I pass over then in silence the chronicle of the three dead ladies, thus coldly commented upon, and which had appeared more interesting to me in the sober words of Zéphyrine and will only relate the following fragment, transcribed by madame d'Ionis from a manuscript dated 1650, and revised by an ancient chaplain of the castle.

“ It is a fact that I have heard in my youth that the castle of Ionis was haunted by three spirits, exhibiting the appearance of ladies richly dressed, who without menacing any one appeared to be seeking something in the rooms and closets of the house. Masses and prayers recited for their benefit proving ineffectual to prevent their return, some one conceived the idea of causing three white loaves to be blessed, and of putting them in the room where the demoiselles d'Ionis had expired. That night they came without making any noise or frightening any one by their appearance, and it was discovered on the following day that they had nibbled the loaves after the manner of mice but had taken nothing away, and on the following night they had recommenced complaining and making the doors creak and bolts groan. For this reason some one conceived the idea of giving them three pitchers of clear water, which they did not drink, but a portion of which they spilled. At length the prior of Saint—— suggested that they might be entirely appeased by offering them a salt-cellar with white salt, on account of their having been poisoned by a loaf without salt, and as soon as this was done they were heard singing a very beautiful song in which we are assured that they promised, in Latin, to bestow blessings and good fortune

upon the younger branch of the Ionis family to whom their property had reverted. This took place, I am told, in the time of King Henri IV, and since then nothing further has been heard of them ; but for a long time a belief existed in the d'Ionis family, that by making them this offering at midnight they could be drawn thither and the future revealed through them. It is even said that if the three loaves, three carafes and a salt-cellar should by chance be discovered on a table in the aforesaid castle, astounding things would be seen and heard in this place."

To this fragment Madame d'Ionis had added the following reflection : " It is much to be regretted for the sake of the d'Ionis family that this fine miracle should have ceased ; all its members would then have been virtuous and wise : but, though I have in my hands a formula of invocation arranged by some astrologer formerly attached to the house, I have no hopes that the green ladies will ever reappear here."

I remained for some time absorbed, not from the effects of this perusal, but rather on account of Madame d'Ionis' pretty handwriting and her elegant revision of the other reflections that accompanied the legend. I did not then make, as I permit myself to-day, any criticism on the easy scepticism of this beautiful lady. I fully sympathized with her on this point. It was the fashion to regard fantastical things not from an artistic but from an ironical point of view. People prided themselves upon not crediting nurses' tales or the superstitions of former ages. I was, besides, strongly disposed to fall in love. They had spoken to me so much at home of this amiable person, and my mother had recommended me so strongly on my departure,

not to allow my head to be turned that it was already partially accomplished. So far I had only been in love with two or three of my cousins, and these affections, rehearsed in verses as chaste as my flame, had not consumed my heart to such an extent that it was not ready to lend itself to burning much more seriously.

I had brought with me a bundle of law papers that my father had made me promise to look over. I opened it conscientiously ; but after having read several pages with my eyes, without taking in the sense of a single word, I soon found out that mode of study was perfectly useless and wisely determined to renounce it. I thought I could make up for my laziness by seriously thinking over the d'Ionis law suit, that I had at the end of my fingers, and I prepared the arguments with which I was to convince the countess of the steps she ought to take. Only, each of these wonderful arguments terminated, I know not how, with some amorous madrigal which had no direct connection with the *procédure*.

In the midst of this important work I was seized with hunger. The muse is not so hard upon children of a family accustomed to live well as to forbid them to sup with a good appetite. I therefore set myself to do justice to the *pâté* which smilingly greeted me among my law papers and my alexandrines, and I unfolded the napkin placed at my plate where, to my great surprise, I found a fourth roll.

This surprise yielded quickly to a very simple train of reasoning. If in the plans and previsions of the dowager, the three cabalistic loaves were to remain intact, it was but natural that one should have been

consecrated to the demands of my appetite. I tasted the wines and found them of so good a quality that I generously made a sacrifice to the phantoms of the carafes of water, designed for their particular use.

And while eating with great pleasure, I, at length, began to think of the chronicle and to ask myself how I should recount the wonders that I could not dispense with having seen. I regretted that Zéphyrine had not furnished me with more details of the three dead women's presumed peculiarities. The extract from the magazine of 1650 was not sufficiently explicit: were these ladies to wait until I was asleep before coming, like mice, to nibble the loaves they were supposed to relish so greatly? Or rather, were they likely to appear at any moment, and seat themselves, one at my left, the other at my right, and the third opposite me?

The bell of the castle announced midnight, it was the classic hour, the fatal hour!

CHAPTER II.

THE APPARITION.

THE clock struck twelve, but the last vibration died away without any ghost appearing. I arose, thinking I was rid of them. I had finished eating and, after a dozen leagues on horseback, began to feel the need of sleep, when the bell of the castle which had a very fine *timbre* solemn and resounding, began again to toll the four quarters and twelve hours with an imposing slowness.

Shall I confess that I felt some emotion at this sort of return of the fantastical hour that I thought had gone by? Why not? So far I had maintained a philosophical composure. Although a fervent disciple of reason, I was none the less a very young man, and a man of imagination, brought up at the knees of a mother, who firmly believed in all the legends which served as lullabies, and which had never appeared in the least laughable to me. I was conscious of experiencing an imperceptible uneasiness, and in order to overcome it—for I felt quite ashamed of it—I hastened to undress myself.

The bell had ceased tolling. I was in bed and about to extinguish my candle, when a clock some distance from the village began in its turn to strike four quarters

and twelve hours, but in a tone so lugubrious and with such dreadful nonchalance, that I was seriously discomposed—and still more so, as it had like the castle clock a double stroke, and appeared as if it would never cease.

In fact, for several minutes it seemed as if I would hear it recommence and that it would strike thirty-seven times ; but this was a pure illusion, as I assured myself by opening my window. The most profound silence reigned in the castle and throughout the country. The sky was quite overcast, the stars were no longer visible ; the air was heavy ; and I could see clouds of moths dancing in the ray of light that my candle cast outside. Their uneasiness was a sign of storm. As I have always enjoyed a tempest greatly, I pleased myself with inhaling its approach. Sudden gusts wafted the perfume of the garden towards me. The nightingale sang once more, then ceased, in order to seek a shelter. I forgot my foolish emotion while enjoying this spectacle of reality.

My room opened on the court of honor, which was immense and surrounded by magnificent buildings, whose delicate proportions were defined in pale blue against the dark sky, by the light of the first flashes.

But the wind arose and drove me from the casement from which it seemed desirous of tearing away the curtains. I closed everything and before again retiring, as I wished to brave the ghosts and satisfy Zéphyrine by accomplishing conscientiously what I presumed to be the rites of invocation, I brushed the table and removed the remains of my repast. I placed the three carafes around the basket. I had not disturbed the salt ; and wishing to establish a complete victory over

myself, by provoking my imagination to its extreme limit, I arranged three chairs around the table and placed three candlesticks upon it, one before each easy chair.

After this, I extinguished all the lights and fell asleep quietly, without failing to compare myself to sire Enguerrand, whose story my mother had often sung to me in the form of a plaintive melody, recounting thus his adventures in the terrible castle of Ardennes.

You can very well believe that my first sleep must have been profound, for I remember nothing more of the storm, and it was not that which awoke me; it was a clinking of glasses on the table, that I at first heard intermingled with my dreams—and that I ended by hearing in reality. I opened my eyes, and—believe me who will, but I was witness of such surprising things, that after twenty years the slightest detail is as clear in my memory as on the first day.

There was some light in the room although I could see no candle burning. It was a species of very vague green flame, which seemed to proceed from the fireplace. By the means of this faint illumination I could see, not very distinctly, but beyond any doubt, three persons, or rather three forms seated on the chairs that I had placed around the table, one at the right, the other at the left, the third between the two first, opposite the first-place, with its back to my bed.

In proportion as my eyes became accustomed to this light, I thought I could distinguish in these three shadows the forms of women, dressed or rather enveloped in voluminous greenish white veils, which at times resembled clouds, and which entirely concealed

their faces, forms and hands. I do not know if they moved ; but, if so, I could see none of their motions : and still the clinking of the glasses continued, as if they had been pushed and knocked against the basket, in a sort of musical measure. After the lapse of several moments, I confess I grew seriously alarmed. I thought I was the dupe of some mystery, and was about to leap resolutely into the middle of the room in order to frighten those who wished to terrify me when, remembering that in this house there could be none but respectable women, perhaps great ladies, who were doing me the honor of amusing themselves at my expense, I suddenly drew my curtain and hurriedly dressed myself.

When this was accomplished, I pulled back the curtain to watch for the time when I should surprise these malicious people by a loud outcry in my harshest voice when, behold ! everything had disappeared, and darkness reigned supreme.

At this period, the means of procuring light instantaneously had not been discovered ; I did not even possess that of obtaining it slowly by aid of my gun-flint. I was thus compelled to feel my way towards the table, where I found absolutely nothing but the easy chairs, the carafes, the candle-sticks and the rolls, in the same order I had placed them.

No perceptible voice had betrayed the departure of the strange visitors ; it is true that the wind was still blowing very hard and howled mournfully down the large chimney of my room.

I opened the window and blinds, and after quite a struggle succeeded in fastening them.

Day had not yet dawned, and the slight trans-

parency of the exterior air was not sufficient to permit me seeing every part of my room, so I was compelled to go by the sense of feeling, not wishing to call any one, or ask questions, so much I feared to appear alarmed. I passed into the *salon* and the room beyond, taking care to make no more noise in my search; then I came back, seated myself upon my bed, struck my watch, and thought over my adventure.

My watch had stopped, and the clocks out of doors struck the half-hour, as if to announce that no other means existed of learning the time.

I listened to the wind and strove to examine its sound or to detect any which might proceed from some corner of my apartment. I tortured my eyes and my ears. I racked my brain also to discover if I had not dreamed what I thought I had seen. The thing was possible, although I could remember no dream that had preceded or led up to this nightmare.

I resolved to torment myself no longer, and to await a return of sleep on my bed without undressing myself in case of some new mystification.

But I could not go to sleep again. Nevertheless, I felt tired and the wind soothed me inexpressibly. I dropped off every few moments, and the next instant I would reopen my eyes, and in spite of myself gaze suspiciously into the darkness and emptiness around me.

I was beginning at last to doze, when the clinking recommenced, and, this time, opening my eyes wide, without moving, I saw the three ghosts in their places, motionless apparently with their green veils floating in the verdant light that proceeded from the fire-place. I feigned sleep, for it was probable that

my open eyes could not be seen in the shadow of the alcove, and I observed attentively. I was no longer frightened; I no longer experienced anything but a curiosity to surprise a mystery either pleasant or disagreeable (as the case might be), a phantasmagoria with well appointed scenery, enacted by living people, or—I confess that I could find no definition for the second hypothesis; it could only be a foolish, and ridiculous one, and still it tormented me as being possible.

I then saw the three shadows arise, and move rapidly and noiselessly around the table with incomprehensible gestures. They had seemed to me of medium height when seated; standing, they were as tall as men. Suddenly, one of them diminished in size, re-assumed the figure of a woman, became quite small, then grew disproportionately tall, and approached me, while the two others remained standing under the shadow of the fire-place.

This affected me very unpleasantly and with a childish movement, I covered my face with my pillow, as if to place an obstacle between myself and the vision.

Then, ashamed of my stupidity, I looked around attentively. The ghost was seated in an easy chair placed at the foot of my bed. I could not see its face. The head and bust were not invisible, but partially obscured by the curtain of the alcove. The light from the fire-place, grown brighter, revealed only the lower portion of a figure and the folds of a garment whose form and color though indeterminate, could no longer be called into question.

It was fearfully immovable, as if nothing breathed under this species of shroud. I waited several moments

that appeared an age to me. I felt that I was losing the coolness with which I had armed myself. I moved in my bed, I thought of flying I knew not where. I resisted this idea. I passed my hands over my eyes, then stretched them out resolutely to seize the spectre by the folds of this perfectly visible garment ; but they encountered space. I threw myself upon the chair, it was empty. Light and vision had alike disappeared. I recommenced rushing through the room and the adjoining apartments. As at first, I found them empty. Quite sure this time that I had neither dreamed nor slept, I stayed up until day-break which did not long delay.

Of late years people have made quite a study of the phenomena of hallucinations ; they have been observed and classified. Scientific men have experimented upon themselves. I have even seen delicate and nervous women often act as spiritual mediums not without suffering, but without fear, and giving a thorough account of this state of delusion in which they had been.

In my youth, they were not so far advanced, there was no medium between the absolute denial of all visions and a blind belief in apparitions. They laughed at those who were tormented by these visions that were attributed to credulity and fear, and only excused in cases of serious illness.

So during this terrible watch, I reprimanded myself severely and unjustly for my weakness of mind, without ever once thinking of attributing it all to the effect of a bad digestion or atmospherical influence. Such an idea would have been entertained with difficulty as with the exception of a little fatigue and bad humor I did not feel in the least ill.

Thoroughly resolved to boast of my adventure to no one, I retired and slept very well until Baptiste knocked at my door to inform me that breakfast would soon be ready. I admitted him after having thoroughly convinced myself that my door had remained bolted, as I had previously assured myself before going to sleep; I had observed, and I again noticed that the other door of my apartment was in a like condition. I counted the large screws which secured the tiles of the fireplace. I sought in vain for the slightest indication of a secret door.

Besides, of what use would it be, said I to myself, whilst Baptiste was powdering my hair; have I not seen an object without substance, a robe, or a shroud which vanished beneath my touch?

Without this conclusive circumstance, I might have attributed it all to a joke of Madame d'Ionis, as I learned from Baptiste that she had returned the evening before towards midnight.

This news snatched me from my preoccupation. I bestowed particular pains upon my *coiffure* and my toilet, and was a little vexed that the nature of my profession condemned me to wear black; but my mother had supplied me with such fine linen and such well cut coats that I considered myself on the whole, very presentable. I was neither ill-looking nor badly formed. I resembled my mother, who had been very beautiful, and without being foppish, I was accustomed to remark the general approval that a pleasing countenance produces.

Madame d'Ionis was in the *salon* when I entered. I beheld a bewitching woman indeed; but much too small to have figured in my trio of spectres. Neither

was there anything fantastical or diaphanous about her. Hers was a realistic beauty, fresh, gay, lively, expressing gracefully, what was designed in the style of the period, an amiable embonpoint, discussing every subject clearly and sensibly, and revealing great energy of character combined with singular sweetness of manner.

After exchanging several words with her, I understood how, thanks to so much intelligence and resolution, candor and cleverness, she managed to live on good terms with a pretty bad husband and a very stupid mother-in-law.

Scarcely had we begun breakfast, when the dowager, scrutinizing me closely, declared that I looked ill and pale, although I had so far forgotten my adventure as to eat with a good appetite, and to be pleasantly affected by the amiable attention of my beautiful hostess.

Then recollecting Zéphyrine's instructions, I hastened to say that I had slept well and had had very pleasant dreams.

"Ah! I was sure of it," cried the old lady evidently enchanted. "One always sleeps well in that room. Tell us your dreams, Monsieur Nivières."

"They were very confused; still I think I can remember a lady."

"Only one?"

"Perhaps two!"

"Perhaps three also?" said Madame d'Ionis, smiling.

"Precisely, madame, you remind me that they were three!"

"Pretty?" said the triumphant dowager.

"Rather pretty, but somewhat faded."

"Really?" said Madame d'Ionis, who seemed to communicate through her eyes with Zéphyrine (who was seated at the lower end of the table), in order to answer me. "And what did they say to you?"

"Incomprehensible things. But if it interests madame, the dowager Countess, I will do my utmost to remember."

"Ah! my dear child," said the dowager, it interests me more than I can say. I will explain by and by. Begin by telling us."

"But it will be very difficult for me to tell. Can any one recount a dream?"

"Perhaps if your memory were assisted," said Madame d'Ionis with great coolness, determined to encourage her mother-in-law's hobby; "did they say nothing to you about the future prosperity of this house?"

"It seems to me they did, in fact."

"Ah! you see, Zéphyrine," cried the dowager; "you who believe in nothing and I wager that they spoke of the law suit: come, Monsieur Nivières, tell us all about it."

A glance from Madame d'Ionis warned me not to answer. I declared that not a word of the law suit had I heard in my dreams. The dowager seemed greatly disappointed, but consoled herself by saying: "It will come! It will come!"

This, "it will come," was very disagreeable to me, although it was said with the utmost benevolence. I did not in the least care to pass another bad night, but I readily resigned myself to my fate when Madame d'Ionis said to me in an undertone, while the dowager was quarreling with Zéphyrine about her lack of faith.

"It is very amiable of you to lend yourself to this fancy of the day in our house. I trust indeed that you will have only pleasant dreams while with us; and you are not absolutely compelled to see these three young ladies every night. It is sufficient that you should have spoken of them to-day to my excellent mother-in-law without laughing. It gives her great pleasure and does not compromise your courage. All of our friends have decided to see them in order to have some peace."

I was sufficiently compensated and magnetized by the air of confiding intimacy that this charming woman assumed towards me to recover my ordinary gayety, and I endeavored, during my meal to recall, little by little, the wonderful things that had been revealed to me. Above all I predicted through the green ladies, a long life to the dowager.

"And my asthma, monsieur?" said she, "did they tell you that I would be cured of my asthma?"

"Not exactly; but they spoke of long life, fortune and health."

"Well, indeed; I ask nothing further of the good God."

"Now, my child," said she to her daughter-in-law, "you who tell a story so well, relate to this good young man the cause of his dreams, and tell him the history of the three young ladies of Ionis."

I assumed an air of surprise, Madame d'Ionis asked permission to give me the manuscript, that she had only prepared, she said, in order to dispense with going over the same story so often.

Breakfast being over, the dowager went to take her siesta.

"It is too warm to go in the garden at noon," said Madame d'Ionis, "and still I do not wish you to work at that horrid law suit just after leaving the table. So if you care to visit the interior of the castle, which is quite interesting, I will act as your guide."

"To accept your proposition is indiscreet and presumptuous," I answered, "and yet I am dying to do so."

"Well, don't die, but come on," said she, with adorable gayety.

But she added immediately, and quite naturally :

"Come with us, my good Zéphyrine ; you will open the doors for us."

An hour before, the addition of Zéphyrine would have been very agreeable to me, but I no longer felt so timid in Madame d'Ionis' society, and I confess that the presence of a third person annoyed me. I certainly had no sort of presumption, no impertinent ideas ; but it seemed to me that I could have talked more sensibly and agreeably in a *tête-à-tête*. The presence of this full moon blunted my ideas, and impeded the flight of my imagination.

And then Zéphyrine was thinking of the thing, that I, most naturally, would gladly have forgotten.

"You see now, Madame Caroline," said she to Madame d'Ionis, while crossing the gallery on the ground floor, "there is nothing at all in the green ladies' room ; M. Nivières has slept there undisturbed."

"Well, dear me ! My good creature, I don't doubt it," answered the young woman.

M. Nivières doesn't impress me as a fool but that doesn't hinder me from believing that the abbé Lamyre *did* see something there.

"Indeed" said I, with some emotion, "I have occasionally had the honor of seeing Monsieur de Lamyre, and I should have thought him no more of a fool than myself."

"He is not a fool, sir," replied Zéphyrine, "he is fond of a joke which gives a serious tone to his jests."

"No," said Madame d'Ionis with decision, "he is a clever man with a powerful imagination. He began by making fun at our expense, and telling us stories about ghosts. It was easy then, not for our good dowager, but for the rest of us, to see that he was joking. But perhaps we should not jest too much about certain foolish ideas. It was very evident to me, that one night something frightened him, since then nothing could persuade him to enter that room. But let us speak of something else, for I am sure that M. Nivières is already sick of this story, as for myself it bores me inexpressibly, and since you have already shown him the manuscript, I am absolved from giving myself any further concern about it."

"It is strange, madame," replied Zéphyrine laughing, one would say that you, in your turn, are beginning to put some faith in this story! I then am the only person in the house who remains incredulous."

We entered the chapel and Madame d'Ionis rapidly sketched its history. She was very cultivated and nothing of a pedant, and exhibited in the course of her explanations all the important rooms, the statues, the paintings and all the rare and precious furniture contained in the castle. She manifested throughout so incomparable a grace and so remarkable a degree of complaisance that I fell in love at first sight, as they say, in love to the extent of being jealous when I

reflected that she was perhaps as amiable with every one as with myself.

In this manner we at length arrived at the immense and magnificent hall divided into two galleries by an beautiful rotunda. This hall was called the library, although only a portion of it was consecrated to books. The other half was a sort of museum for pictures and works of art. The rotunda contained a fountain surrounded by flowers. Madame d'Ionis called my attention to this valuable monument, that had recently been removed from the gardens and placed here to preserve it from accident, the fall of a large branch on a stormy night having slightly injured it.

It was a rock of white marble on which marine monsters were intertwined, and above them, on the most elevated portion, a naiad, regarded as a *chef-d'œuvre*, was gracefully seated. This group was thought to be the work of Jean Goujon or of one of his best pupils.

The nymph, instead of being nude, was chastely draped; a circumstance which caused it to be thought that it was the portrait of a modest lady who had not been willing to pose in the simple apparel of a goddess, or permit the artist to interpret her elegant figure in order to exhibit it to the gaze of a profane public. But these draperies, from which the upper part of the bust and arms as far as the shoulders alone were released did not prevent one from appreciating the ensemble of this extraordinary type which characterizes the statuary of the renaissance, those slight proportions, that roundness combined with slenderness, that delicacy allied to strength, that indefinable something more beautiful than nature, which at first sur-

prises us like a dream, and which little by little captivates the most enthusiastic region of the mind. One knows not if these beauties were conceived for the senses, but they do not affect them. They seem to owe their origin to a Divinity in some Eden, or on some Mount Ida, from which they have but descended against their will, to mingle in the realities of earth. Such is the famous Diana of Goujon, majestic, almost terrifying in aspect, despite the serene sweetness of its lineaments, exquisite and monumental, informed with physical vigor and yet calm as intellectual force.

I had as yet seen nothing of that national statuary, that we have perhaps never sufficiently appreciated, and which places the France of that period on a level with the Italy of Michael Angelo. I did not at first comprehend what I beheld. I was besides ill-disposed towards it, while comparing this extraordinary type with the plump and dainty beauty of Madame d'Ionis, a true Louis XV. specimen, ever smiling and more attractive, on account of her vitality, than through any grandeur of the intellect.

"This is more beautiful than true, *n'est-ce pas?*" said she calling my attention to the long arms and serpentine body of the naiad.

"I don't think so," I replied while regarding Madame d'Ionis with involuntary ardor.

She did not appear to pay the least attention.

"Let us stop here," said she, "the air is so cool and refreshing. If you wish, we will speak of business. Zéphyrine, my dear, you may leave us."

I was at last alone with her! Two or three times during the past hour, the beautiful glance of her eye, unaffectedly vivacious and loving, had given me a

vertigo, and I had thought were Zéphyrine not here I would throw myself at her feet.

But hardly had she left us than I felt myself chained by a sentiment of respect and fear, and at once began to discuss the law suit with a desperate perspicacity.



CHAPTER III.

THE LAW SUIT.

“ ‘SO,” said she after having listened with attention, there is no way of losing it ? ”

“ The opinion of my father as well as of myself, is that in order to lose it, it would be necessary to desire its loss.”

“ But your worthy father has surely understood that I did wish it absolutely ? ”

“ No, madame,” replied I with firmness, for it was a question of my duty, and I assumed the only part proper for me to play, in the presence of this noble lady.

“ No, my father does not so understand it. His conscience forbids him to betray the interests confided to him by M. le comte d’Ionis. He thinks that you will induce your husband to adopt a compromise and he will render it as acceptable as possible to the adversaries that you protect. But he will never bring himself to persuade M. d’Ionis that his cause is bad in justice.”

“ In legal justice,” she replied, with a sweet sad smile ; “ but, in real justice, in moral and natural justice, your worthy father knows well that our right leads us to exercise a cruel spoliation.”

“ What my father thinks of this subject,” I replied a little confused, “ he is only accountable for to his own

conscience. When a lawyer can defend a cause where the two justices of which you speak are in his favor, he is very fortunate, thoroughly compensated for those cases where he finds them in opposition; but he ought never to observe this distinction when he has voluntarily accepted the charge, and you know, madame, that my father has only consented to oppose M. d'Ailane because you wished him to do so."

"I did wish it, yes! I obtained my husband's consent that this suit should not be confided to another; I hoped that your father, the best and most honest man of my acquaintance would succeed in saving this unhappy family from the rigorous pursuit of my own. A lawyer can always show himself reticent and generous, above all when he knows that he will not be blamed by his principal client. And I am this client, monsieur. It concerns my fortune, and not M. d'Ionis, which nothing menaces."

"It is true, madame but you are in the power of your husband; and the husband, like the chief of the community...."

"Ah! I know the rest! He has more rights over my fortune than I myself possess, and he uses them in my interest, I am willing to believe it, but he forgets, that in this, my conscience is concerned; and for whom? He has an immense personal fortune and no children; I have then before God the right to despoil myself of a portion of my wealth in order not to ruin honest people, victims of a question of procedure."

"Such a sentiment is worthy of you, madame, and I am not here to dispute so fine a right, but to remind you of our duty, and to beg of you not to require us to be faithless to our trust. All the con-

cessions consistent with the success of your suit, we will observe, even should we incur the reproaches of M. d'Ionis and those of his mother. But to withdraw from the accepted task, declaring that success is doubtful, and that it would be better to compromise, is what a thorough investigation of the affair forbids us to do, under penalty of falsehood and betrayal."

"Indeed, no! You are mistaken," cried Madame d'Ionis excitedly. "I assure you, you are mistaken. These are legal subtleties which may deceive a man grown old in the practice of law, but that a *sensible* young man ought not to accept as an absolute rule of conduct..... If your father has undertaken the suit, and you admit that he has done so at my request, it is because he foresaw my intentions. Had he been ignorant of them, I should greatly regret the fact, and I would think that you did not entertain the esteem for me that I would have liked to inspire in the members of your family. In this case where one feels that victory would be horrible, one does not fear to propose peace before the battle. To act otherwise is to conceive a false idea of duty. Duty is not a military password, it is a religion, and a religion which would prescribe evil, ceases to be one. Hush! speak to me no more of your charge. Do not place M. d'Ionis' ambition above my honor, do not make a sacred thing of this ambition. It is a disgraceful thing, no more, and no less. Unite your efforts with mine to save these unfortunate people. Act so that I may find in you a friend after my own heart, rather than an infallible legislator and an implacable lawyer!"

While speaking thus she gave me her hand and enveloped me in the enthusiastic fire of her beautiful

eyes. I lost my head and covering her hand with kisses, I felt myself conquered. In fact, I was so in advance I had been of her opinion before seeing her. I still defended myself however, for I had sworn to my father that I would not yield to the sentimental considerations that his client had caused him to foresee in her letters. Madame d'Ionis would not hear a word of my defense.

"You speak," said she, "like a good son, who is pleading his father's cause, but I would like you better, were you not so good a lawyer."

"Ah! madame," I cried heedless of consequences, "do not say that I am pleading against you, for you would make me hate too much a calling for which I feel that I have not the requisite insensibility."

I will not weary you with the particulars of the law suit instituted by the d'Ionis family against the d'Aillanes. The conversation I have just reported will suffice to explain my story. It concerned an estate of five hundred thousand francs, that is to say, almost all the funded fortune of our beautiful client. M. d'Ionis made a very bad use of the immense wealth that he possessed on his own side of the house. He was given over to dissipation, and the doctors allowed him but two years to live. It was quite possible that he would leave his widow more debts than money. Should Madame d'Ionis renounce the benefit of the law suit, she would then incur the risk of falling from a state of opulence, into a condition of mediocrity to which she had not been brought up. My father pitied the d'Aillane family greatly, a family deserving the highest esteem, and which included a worthy gentleman, his wife and his two children. The loss of the

law suit would plunge them into misery ; but my father naturally preferred to devote himself to the future of his client and to preserve her from disaster. This was for him a true case of conscience ; but he had recommended me not to urge this consideration with her. “ Her soul is romantic and sublime,” said he, “ and the more her personal interest is alleged, the greater pride and pleasure she will take in the joy of her sacrifice ; but with the approach of age, her enthusiasm will disappear. Then look out for regrets ; and look out also for the reproaches that she will justly heap upon us for not having wisely counselled her.”

My father did not know that I was so much of an enthusiast in fact. Engaged in numberless affairs, he had confided to me the care of subduing the generous impulses of this admirable woman, by taking refuge behind pretended scruples which he only considered as accessories. It was a very good idea, but he had not foreseen any more than myself that I would share Madame d'Ionis' opinion to such an extent. I was at an age when material wealth is of no value in the imagination ; it is a period of a wealth of heart.

And then this woman, who produced upon me the effect of a spark on powder ; this despicable absent husband condemned by his physicians ; the moderate circumstances which threatened her, and towards which she smilingly stretched her arms—how did I know ?

I was an only son, my father possessed some fortune and I could also acquire one. I was only a *bourgeois*, who owed a position to a magistracy in the past, and in the present to the consideration attached to talent and probity ; but we were in the midst of a philosoph-

ical period, and without thinking ourselves on the verge of a radical revolution, one could readily admit the idea of an impoverished woman of quality, marrying a man of lower condition in easy circumstances.

In short, my youthful imagination was fired, and my young heart instinctively desired the loss of Madame d'Ionis' fortune. While she talked with animation about the annoyances of wealth and the happiness of a reduced condition *à la* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I made such rapid strides in my romance that it seemed as if she were deigning to guess at my thoughts and was alluding to them in each one of the intoxicating words that fell from her lips.

I did not however surrender openly. My word was pledged ; I could only promise to try and dissuade my father. I could give no assurance of success, for I did not myself participate in any. I knew the firmness of his decisions. The solution was approaching, we had reached the termination of delays and evasive procedures. Madame d'Ionis proposed a plan, in case she should bring me over to her views. It was that my father should feign illness when the time arrived to plead the cause, that the case then should be confided to me, and that I should lose it !

I confess that I took fright at this hypothesis and that I then understood my father's scruples. To hold in one's hands the destiny of a client and to sacrifice her rights to a question of sentiment, is a fine role when one can fill it openly and by her order ; but such was not my position. On account of M. d'Ionis, it was necessary to preserve appearances, to execute errors adroitly, and to employ deceit in order that virtue might triumph. I became frightened, I grew pale, I almost

wept, for I was in love, and the idea of refusing broke my heart.

"Let us say no more about it," said Madame d'Ionis kindly, she seemed now to divine, if she had not already done so, the passion she had awakened in me. "Pardon me for having put your conscience to this proof. No! You must not sacrifice it to mine, we must find some other means of securing these poor adversaries. We will search for it together, for you are on my side, I see it, I feel it, in spite of yourself. You must stay with me for several days. Write to your father that I am resisting and that you are endeavoring to overcome my scruples. To my mother-in-law, we will have the appearance of studying the chances of success together. She is persuaded that I am a born lawyer, and Heaven is my witness, that before this deplorable affair, I knew no more about such things than she herself, which isn't saying much! "Come," she added, resuming her charming and sympathetic gayety, "do not let us torment ourselves and don't be so sad! We will contrive to find some cause for delay. Ah! I have one now, a most singular and absurd one, but which none the less would exercise an all-powerful influence over the mind of the good dowager, and even over M. d'Ionis. Can't you guess it?"

"I have no idea what you mean."

"Well then it is this, to make the green ladies speak."

"What! really, does M. d'Ionis share his mother's credulity?"

"M. d'Ionis is very brave, he has given proofs of it; but he believes in ghosts and fears them. Let the

three young ladies forbid us to hasten the law suit and the suit will remain inactive."

"So, you can think of nothing better to satisfy the desire I feel of aiding you, than that of condemning me to the use of abominable impostures? Ah! Madame, how well you understand the art of making people unhappy!"

"What! you are so scrupulous as all that? Haven't you already participated with a good grace?"

"A joke without consequences was all very well; but if M. d'Ionis inquires into the matter and summons me to declare upon my honor....."

"True! 'T is only another worthless idea! Let us attempt no more to-day." "*La nuit porte conseil.*"

"To-morrow, perhaps, I shall at last be able to propose something practicable. It is getting late, and I hear the abbé Lamyre who is looking for us."

The abbé Lamyre was a charming little man. Although fifty years old, he was still fresh and good-looking. He was kind, frivolous, witty, entertaining, full of fun, and in fact, held philosophical opinions, always agreeing with those whom he conversed with, for the question with him was not to persuade, but to please. He threw his arms around my neck, and heaped praises upon me which I esteemed at their proper value, as coming from one whom I knew lavished them upon everyone, but for which I was more thankful than usual, on account of the pleasure they seemed to afford Madame d'Ionis.

He praised my great talents as a lawyer and poet and forced me to recite some verses, which appeared to be relished more than they deserved. Madame d'Ionis, after having complimented me with an air of emotion

and sincerity, left us together to attend to the cares of her household.

The abbé talked of a thousand things that did not interest me. I would have liked to be alone to indulge in a reverie, to recall each word, each gesture of Madame d'Ionis ; but the abbé attached himself to me, and told me numerous ingenious stories that I consigned to the devil. At last, the conversation assumed a lively interest for me, when it turned upon the burning ground of my relations with Madame d'Ionis.

"I know what brings you here," said he, "she has already spoken to me about it. Without knowing the day of your visit, she was expecting you. Your father does not wish her to ruin herself, and, *parbleu*, he is very right. But he will not convince her, and you must either quarrel with her, or let her have her own way. If she believed in the green ladies, *a la bonne heure*, you might make them speak in her interest, but unfortunately she has no more faith in them than you or I !"

"Madame d'Ionis pretends however that you do believe in them, Monsieur l'abbé.

"I? She told you that? Yes, yes, I know she treats her little friend as if he were a great coward ! Sing the duo with her, I am not afraid of the green ladies, I do not believe in them ; but there is certainly one thing that alarms me, it is having seen them."

"How then do you reconcile such contradictory assertions?"

"Nothing more simple, either there are ghosts or there are none. I myself have seen them, and I have paid the penalty for knowing that they exist. Only I do not consider them malicious, I am not afraid of

their injuring me, I was not born a coward, but I mistrust my brain which is composed of saltpetre. I know that shadows have no more power over bodies than bodies have over shadows, since I have held the sleeve of one of these young ladies without discovering any kind of arm. From that moment, which I shall never forget; and which has changed all my ideas about the things of this world and of the next, I have sworn to myself that never again would I put human weakness to such a test. I am not at all desirous of losing my reason. So much the worse for me if I have not sufficient moral strength to coolly and philosophically contemplate what passes my understanding; but why should I deceive myself? I began by trifling with myself, and laughingly summoned the ghost. The ghost appeared. — *Bonjour!* Once is enough for me, you won't catch me in it another time."

One can readily imagine that I was strongly impressed by what I had heard. The abbé's faith was evident. He did not believe that he was the victim of a mania. Since the emotions he had experienced in "*la chambre aux dames*," he had never again dreamed of them. He added that he was convinced that they would have done him no kind of harm or injury, had he possessed sufficient courage to examine them. "But I did not," he observed, "for I almost lost consciousness, and realizing my weakness, I said."

"Whoever wishes to do so may penetrate this mystery, I will not assume the charge, I am not equal to such a task."

I questioned the abbé carefully. His vision had been almost exactly like my own. I made a great effort not to let him suspect the similarity of our

adventures. I knew he was too much of a gossip to preserve the secret inviolate, and I feared Madame d'Ionis' sarcasms more than all the demons of the night; so I assumed an air of ignorance while the abbé questioned me, assuring him that nothing had disturbed my sleep; and when the moment arrived at eleven o'clock in the evening, to re-enter this fatal room, I laughingly promised the dowager to keep a secret account of my dreams, and took leave of the company with an air of gayety and valor.

Nevertheless I was far from feeling either the one or the other. The presence of the abbé, the supper and the evening spent under the dowager's eyes, had rendered Madame d'Ionis more reserved than she had been with me in the morning. She also seemed to say in each allusion to our sudden and cordial intimacy: "You know at what price I have granted it to you." I was vexed with myself, I had been neither submissive enough, or sufficiently independent, I seemed to have betrayed the mission my father had confided to me, without in the least advancing my chimeras of love.

The sombre interior reacted upon my impressions and my beautiful apartment wore a gloomy and lugubrious air. I knew not what to think of either the abbé's reason or my own. Had it not been for a feeling of *mauvaise honte*, I would have asked for other lodgings and I really experienced a sensation of anger, when I saw Baptiste enter with the accursed waiter, the basket, the three loaves and all the absurd accompaniments of the previous evening.

"What does this mean?" said I testily. "Am I hungry? Haven't I just left the table?"

"Indeed, Monsieur," he replied, "I think it is very odd. It was Mademoiselle Zéphyrine who ordered me to bring it to you. It was of no use for me to tell her that you were in the habit of passing your nights in sleeping, and not in eating, she answered laughingly :

"Take it all the same, it is a custom we have always observed. It will not annoy your master and you will see that he will be pleased to have you leave it in his room."

"Very well, *mon ami*, do me the favor of carrying it back, without saying anything about it in the servant's hall. I need my table to write upon."

Baptiste obeyed. I locked myself in, and retired, after having written to my father. I confess that I slept splendidly and dreamed of but one lady, Madame d'Ionis.

The next day, the dowager assailed me anew with questions. I was so rude as to declare that I had dreamed nothing worth mentioning. The good lady was greatly disappointed.

"I am sure," said she to Zéphyrine, "that you did not put the ladies' supper in M. Nivières' room?"

"Pardon me, madame," replied Zéphyrine, looking at me reproachfully.

Madame d'Ionis seemed also to say with her eyes, that I was disobliging. The abbé exclaimed ingeniously :

"It is strange ; these things then happen only to me?"

After breakfast he left, and Madame d'Ionis appointed a meeting with me, at one o'clock, in the library. I was there at noon ; but she sent me word by Zéphyrine that she was besieged by importunate visitors

and that I must have patience. This was easier to ask than acquire. I waited ; the minutes seemed centuries. I asked myself how I had managed to exist up to this time, without this *tête-à-tête* that I already called *daily*, and how I could go on living when there would be no further occasion to expect it. I sought for some means that should entail the necessity, and resolved at last to protract the law suit, to the extent of my poor abilities, and I puzzled my brains over a thousand subterfuges which did not even possess the merit of common sense.

While walking up and down the gallery, in my agitation, I every now and then stopped before the fountain and sometimes seated myself upon its brink, that was surrounded by magnificent flowers, artistically disposed in the crevices of the rough rock on top of which rested a block of white marble. This rugged base gave a more finished effect to the work of the chisel causing the water to overflow in brilliant sheets into the lower receptacles, which were adorned with aquatic plants.

It was a delicious spot, and the reflection of the stained glass occasionally imparted an appearance of life to the fantastical features of the statuary.

I regarded the naiad with renewed wonder, surprised to find it so beautiful and realizing at last the exalted sense of this mysterious loveliness which I no longer thought of comparing unfavorably with that of Madame d'Ionis. I felt that all comparisons are puerile between inanimate objects and beings that bear no resemblance to each other. This inspiration of Jean Goujon's had a beauty peculiar to itself—the face wore an expression of sublime sweetness—and seemed to communicate a feeling of repose and happiness to the mind, like the

sensation of freshness imparted by the continuous murmur of the limped waters of the fountain. At last Madame d'Ionis made her appearance.

"Here is some news," said she, seating herself familiarly near me; "look at this strange letter that I have just received from M. d'Ionis."

And she showed it to me with an *abandon* that affected me strongly. I was disgusted with a husband whose letters to such a wife could be shown without embarrassment to the first comer.

The letter was cold, long and diffuse, the characters slender and tremulous, the orthography very doubtful. Here is the substance of it:

"You ought not to have any scruples about gaining your end. I have none whatever in employing the most rigid legal means. I refuse all other arrangements than those I have already proposed to the d'Aillanes, and I wish to see a termination to this law suit. You may, when it is once gained, extend a helping hand to them, I shall not oppose your generosity, but I wish for no compromise. Their lawyer has offended me in his address in the first place, and the appeal that they have lodged is presumptuous beyond belief. I find M. Nivières very sluggish, and I have expressed my displeasure through the mail to-day. Act, yourself, stimulate his zeal, unless some higher order should issue from——. You know what I mean, and I am surprised that you say nothing to me about what may have been observed in the room—since my departure. Has no one had the courage to pass the night there and to write down what he may have heard? Must we depend alone on the assertions of the abbé de Lamyre, a man who does not speak

seriously? Let some one *worthy of belief* attempt this proof, unless you have sufficient courage to do so yourself, which would not surprise me."

As she read this last sentence, Madame d'Ionis burst out laughing.

"M. d'Ionis amuses me," she said. "He flatters me so that he may induce me to attempt a thing that he would never think of doing himself, and he is indignant at the cowardice of people for whose benefit nothing would induce him to give such an example."

"What I find most remarkable in this," said I, "is M. d'Ionis' faith in these apparitions, and his respect for the decisions he believes them capable of rendering."

"You see now," said she, "that this is the only means of subduing his rigor towards the poor d'Aillanes; I told you so, and I repeat it, and you will not lend yourself to it, when the opportunity is so fine. Since he is so anxious to receive the green ladies' revelations perhaps he will not go so far as to ask you for your word of honor."

"It seems to me, on the contrary, that I must seriously assume the role of imposter, since M. d'Ionis demands the assertion of a person '*worthy of belief*.'"

"And then you fear the ridicule, the blame, the jests that you would not fail to meet with; but I could answer for M. d'Ionis' absolute silence so far as that is concerned."

"No, madame, no! I would fear neither ridicule nor blame, as long as it was a question of obedience to your wishes. But you would despise me if I merited this blame by a false oath. Besides, why not try to

induce the d'Aillanes to consent to a compromise conveying honorable conditions to themselves?"

"You know perfectly well that those M. d'Ionis proposes are not honorable."

"You have then no hope of modifying his intentions?"

She shook her head and was silent. This gesture was an eloquent explanation of the kind of man her husband was, a creature without heart or principle, indifferent to such an array of charms, and given over to excesses.

"Still," replied I, "he authorizes you to be generous after victory."

"And what does he take them for?" cried she, crimsoning with anger. "He forgets that the d'Aillanes are the soul of honor, and will never receive as a favor or benefit, what justice causes them to regard as the legal property of their family."

I was struck with the energy she infused into this reply.

"Are you then so intimate with the d'Aillanes?" I asked. "I was not aware of it."

She blushed again and answered in the negative.

"I have never had much to do with them," said she; "but they are nearly enough related to me for our honor to be identical. I am quite sure that it was my uncle's wish to leave them his fortune, and still more as M. d'Ionis having married me for what is termed *mes beaux yeux*, did not at that time have the countenance to look up a fortune for me by means of breaking this will, through some legal defect." Then she added;

"Are you not acquainted with any of the d'Aillanes?"

"I have seen the father quite often, the children never, the son is an officer in a garrison somewhere or other."

"At Tours," said she quickly. Then she added, still more hastily :

"At least I think so."

"They say he is a very fine fellow!"

"I am told so, but I have not seen him since he has grown up."

This answer reassured me. For an instant it had occurred to me that the disinterested magnanimous motives of Madame d'Ionis might be attributable to a passion that she entertained for her cousin d'Aillane.

"His sister is charming," said she; "Have you never seen her?"

"Never, isn't she still in the convent?"

"Yes, at Angers, they say she is an angel. Will you not be proud when you have succeeded in plunging a daughter of a good house into misery? One who counted rightfully, upon an honorable marriage and a life agreeable to her rank and education? This is what troubles her poor father more than anything else. But come, tell me your expedients, for you have sought and found some, have you not?"

"Yes," I replied, after having reflected as well as one can reflect in a fever. "I have found a solution."

CHAPTER IV.

THE NAIAD.

I HAD hardly imparted this hope of success, when I was terrified at having entertained it myself, but I could not now withdraw. My beautiful client overwhelmed me with questions.

"Well, madame," said I, "the means must be found of making the oracle speak, without my acting the part of an imposter; but you must furnish me with certain details which I lack, concerning the apparition, whose theatre of action as they affirm is this castle."

"Will you look over the old papers from which I made my extracts?" cried she joyfully. "I have them here." She opened a piece of furniture of which she had the key, and showed me quite a long account, with commentaries written at different epochs by different chroniclers attached to the chapel of the castle, or to the chapter of a neighboring convent that had been secularized under the last reign.

As I was in no hurry to undertake an engagement which would have abridged the time accorded to my mission I put off reading this fantastical bundle of papers until evening, and allowed myself to be chastely cajoled by my enchantress. It seemed to me that she was exercising a delicate coquetry, whether it was that

she clung to her ideas to the extent of compromising herself a little in order to triumph eventually, whether my resistance excited her legitimate pride of an irresistible woman, or whether, in fine, and I dwelt with delight on this last supposition, she was animated by a particular regard for me.

She was forced to leave me, other visitors were arriving. There was company at dinner; she presented me to her noble neighbors with marked distinction, and showed me more consideration before them, than I had perhaps any right to expect. Some appeared to think that I was receiving more than my position entitled me to, and tried to make her so understand it. She proved that she feared no criticism, and showed so much courage in sustaining me that I began to lose my head.

When we were alone together, Madame d'Ionis asked me what I intended doing with the manuscripts relative to the apparition of the three green ladies? I was over excited, it seemed as if she really loved me and that I had now no occasion to fear her raillery. I then recounted ingenuously, the vision I had seen, and the one similar to it, that the abbé Lamyre had related to me.

"So I am forced to believe," I added, "that conditions of the soul exist in which, equally without fear, charlatanism or supposition, certain ideas assume images which deceive our senses, and I wish to study these phenomena, that I have already witnessed, under the simple or sage conditions which have produced them. I do not conceal from you, that contrary to my habits of mind, far from guarding myself from the charm of these illusions, I will do everything in my

power to yield my intellect up to them. And should I in this poetical disposition of mind, succeed in seeing or hearing some ghost who commands me to obey you, I will not draw back from the oath that M. d'Ionis or his mother may require. No one can force me to swear that I believe in the revelations of spirits or in apparitions of the dead, for perhaps I may not put absolute faith in them, but in asserting that I have heard voices, since even now I can affirm that I have seen shadows, I will not be a liar, and should I be taken for a fool, what do I care as long as you do me the honor of not sharing this opinion?"

Madame d'Ionis exhibited great surprise at what I told her, and asked me many questions relative to my vision in the ladies' room. She listened without laughing, and was even astonished at the calmness with which I had undergone this strange adventure.

"I see," said she, "that you are very strong-minded. As to me, I confess, that in your place I would have been afraid. Before permitting you to make another attempt, swear that you will be no more affected or frightened by it than the first time."

"I think I can promise that," I replied. "I feel excessively calm, and should I witness any terrifying spectacle, I trust that I shall remain master of myself sufficiently to attribute it solely to my imagination."

"Do you wish to make this extraordinary invocation to-night, then?"

"Perhaps; but I would prefer first to read all the reports concerning it, and I would also like to glance over some work on this subject, not any derogatory *critique*, my doubts are sufficiently established, but one of those ancient, simple treatises where among

many absurdities, I may chance to discover some ingenious ideas."

"Very well, you are right," said she, "but I do not know what work to recommend. I have never dipped into these old books; if you would like, to-morrow, to look over the library"——.

"If you will permit me, I will set about this task at once. It is only eleven o'clock, this is the time that your house subsides into silence. I will sit up in the library, and if my imagination becomes slightly excited, I will then be in a fit frame of mind to return to my room so that I may offer to the three ladies the commemorative supper which possesses the virtue of attracting them hither."

"I will order the famous tray to be taken there then," said Madame d'Ionis, smilingly, "and I am forcing myself to look only on the strange side of this affair, not to be too much impressed by it."

"What, madame, you too!"

"Eh, *mon Dieu*," she exclaimed, "after all, what do we know about it? We ridicule everything nowadays; are we any the wiser for it than formerly? We are weak creatures, who think ourselves strong; who knows if we do not thus render ourselves more material than God desired, and if what we take for lucidity of vision is not really blindness. Like myself, you believe in the immortality of the soul. Is an absolute separation between our own and those freed from matter so clear a thing to conceive that we can prove it?"

She talked in this fashion for several minutes with a great deal of intelligence and imagination; then left me, a little disturbed, begging me in case I should

become nervous or beset by lugubrious ideas, to abandon my project. I was so happy and so touched by her solicitude, that I expressed my regret at not having a little fear to overcome so that I might better prove my zeal.

I went up stairs to my room, where Zéphyrine had already arranged the basket; Baptiste wanted to take it away.

"Leave it," said I, "since it is the custom of the house, and go to bed, I have no more need of you than I have ever had."

"*Mon Dieu, monsieur,*" said he, "if you will permit me, I will pass the night on an easy chair in your room."

"And why, my friend?"

"Because I have heard there were ghosts here. Yes, yes, sir, I understand the servants now, they are very much afraid of these ghosts, and I who am an old soldier, I would like to show them that I am not so foolish as they are."

I refused, however, and left him to arrange the bed, while I went down to the library, after having told him not to wait for me. I wandered through the immense hall before beginning my work, and locked myself in carefully, lest I should be disturbed by some prying or mischievous valet. I then lighted a silver candlebra with numerous branches and began to turn over the leaves of the fantastical pamphlet relative to the green ladies.

The frequent apparition of the d'Ionis demoiselles observed and reported in detail coincided in every particular with what I had seen and with what the abbé had recounted to me. But then neither he nor I

had possessed sufficient faith, or courage to question the phantoms. Others had done so, according to the chroniclers, and it had been reserved for them to see the three maidens, no longer as greenish clouds, but in all the brilliancy of their youth and beauty, not all of them at once, but one in particular, while the others remained in the background. Then this funereal beauty answered all *serious* and *decent* questions that might be asked of her. She unveiled the secrets of the past, of the present, and of the future. She gave judicious advice. She informed those who were capable of making a good use of them where treasures lay concealed. She foretold disasters that might be averted, mistakes to be repaired. She spoke in the name of God and of the angels. She was a beneficent power to those who consulted her with good and pious designs, but she invariably reproved and threatened mockers and impious people. According to the manuscript, they had been known to inflict severe punishment upon those whose intentions were wicked or fraudulent, and those who were only influenced by malice or idle curiosity might expect fearful things to befall them, such as they would have bitter cause to regret.

Without particularizing these fearful things, the manuscript furnished the formula of invocation and all the rules to be observed, with so much seriousness and such naïve good faith that I yielded myself to its influence. The apparition assumed such marvelous colors in imagination as to beguile me rather to desire than to fear it. I did not feel in the least depressed or alarmed at the idea of seeing the dead walk or of hearing them speak ; on the contrary, I revelled in elysian

dreams, and beheld a Beatrix arise in the rays of my empyrean.

"And why should these dreams be denied me," I exclaimed, mentally, "since the prologue of the vision has already been vouchased me? My foolish fears have hitherto rendered me unworthy and incapable of believing in Swedenborgian revelations, such as superior minds credit and which I have mistakenly ridiculed. But now I will gladly renounce these old illusions, and such sentiments will surely be more healthful and agreeable to the soul of a poet than the cold denial of our age. If I pass for a madman, should I even become one, what matters it; I will have lived in an ideal sphere, and will, perhaps, be happier than all the sages of the earth combined."

Thus I communed with myself, resting my head on my hands. It was about two o'clock in the morning and the most profound silence reigned throughout the castle and the surrounding country, when a sound of delicate and exquisite music, which seemed to proceed from the rotunda snatched me from my reverie. I raised my head and pushed back the candlestick, so that I could see to whom I was indebted for this serenade, but the four candles which lighted my writing-table thoroughly, were not sufficient for me to distinguish objects at the end of the hall even, still less the rotunda beyond.

I proceeded at once towards this rotunda and being no longer dazzled by another light, I could distinguish the upper portion of the beautiful group in the fountain, fully illuminated by the moon, whose rays penetrated the arched window of the cupola. The rest of the circular hall was in shadow. In order to assure

myself that I was as much alone as I appeared to be, I drew back the bolt of the large glass door which opened on the parterre, and saw in fact that no one was there. The music had seemed to diminish and fade away in proportion to my approach, so that I now could scarcely hear it. I passed into the other gallery, and found it also deserted, but here the sounds which had so charmed me could once more be heard distinctly, and this time they seemed to proceed from the rear.

I paused without turning around, to listen to them ; they were sweet and plaintive and formed a melodious combination beyond my comprehension. It was rather a succession of vague and mysterious chords, struck as if by chance and executed by instruments that I could not divine, for their tones resembled nothing that I had ever heard. The effect although pleasing was exceedingly melancholy.

I retraced my steps and convinced myself that these voices, if voices they could be called, issued decidedly from the shell of the tritons and nymphs of the fountain, increasing and diminishing in intensity as the water which now flowed in an irregular and intermittent manner, increased or decreased in the basins.

I saw nothing fantastical in this for I remembered having heard of those Italian jets, which produced hydraulic organs of a more or less successful nature, through means of air compressed by water. These sounds were sweet and very true, perhaps because they attempted no air and only sighed forth harmonious chords somewhat after the manner of eolian harps.

I also remembered that Madame d'Ionis had spoken to me of this music, telling me that it was out of

order, and that sometimes it played by itself for several minutes.

This solution did not prevent me from pursuing the course of my poetical reveries. I was grateful to this capricious fountain who reserved its music for me alone, on such a beautiful night and amid so religious a silence.

Seen thus by the light of the moon, the effect was startling, a shower of green diamonds appeared to be descending upon the fresh ferns that were planted around the border. There was something appalling in the appearance of the tritons, immovable in the midst of all this tumult, and their dying murmurs, mingled with the subdued sound of the cascades, made them seem as if in despair that their passionate souls should be chained in bodies of marble. One would have thought it a scene from Pagan life that had been suddenly petrified by the sovereign touch of the naiad.

I then remembered the species of fear that this nymph had caused me in broad daylight, with her air of proud repose in the midst of these monsters writhing beneath her feet.

Can an unemotional soul express true beauty? thought I, and should this creature of marble awake to life, despite her magnificence would she not terrify one, by that air of supreme indifference which renders her so superior to the beings of our race?

I regarded her attentively in the light of the moonbeams which bathed her white shoulders and revealed her small head set upon a firm and slender neck as upon a column. I could not distinguish her features, as she was at too great a height; but her easy attitude

was defined in brilliant lines with an incomparable grace.

This is truly, thought I, the idea I would fain picture to myself of the green lady, for surely, seen thus.

Suddenly I ceased to reason or reflect. It seemed to me that I saw the statue move.

I thought that a cloud was passing over the moon and had produced the illusion; but there was none. Only, it was not the statue that moved, it was a form that arose from behind or beside her, and which seemed exactly like her, as if an animate reflection had detached itself from this body of marble and had quitted it to approach me. For a moment I doubted the evidence of my senses, but it became so distinct, so positive, that I was soon convinced that I beheld a real being, and that I experienced no feeling of terror, nor even any very great surprise.

The living image of the naiad descended the irregular steps of the monument with a flying motion; her movements were easy and ideally graceful. She was not much taller than a real woman, although the elegance of her proportions imparted a stamp of exceptional beauty, which had intimidated me in the statue; but I no longer experienced aught of this feeling, and my admiration rose to ecstasy. I stretched out my arms to seize her, for it seemed as if she were about to rush towards me leaping over a height of from five to six feet which still separated us.

I was mistaken. She stopped on the edge of the rock and made me a sign to move back.

I obeyed mechanically and saw her seat herself upon a marble dolphin, which at once began to roar in a

genuine fashion; then suddenly all these hydraulic voices increased like a tempest and formed a truly diabolical concert around her.

I began to be somewhat unnerved when a ghostly greenish light, which seemed but a more brilliant moonbeam burst from I knew not where, distinctly revealing the features of the living naiad, so like those of the statue that I had to look twice in order to assure myself that it had not quitted its rocky chair of state.

Then, no longer seeking to unravel this mystery without any desire to comprehend it, I became dumbly intoxicated with the supernatural beauty of this apparition. The effect that it produced upon me was so absolute, that I never even thought of approaching it, in order to assure myself of its immateriality, as I had done before when it had appeared in my room.

And had I entertained such an idea, which I am altogether unconscious of doing, the fear of causing it to vanish by an audacious curiosity probably withheld me.

How did it happen that I was not overcome by the desire of verifying the evidence of my senses? 'Twas in truth the influence of the sublime naiad, with clear and living eyes, beaming with a fascinating sweetness, the naiad, with undraped arms, contours of transparent flesh and supple motions resembling those of childhood. This daughter of Heaven seemed at the utmost about fifteen years old. The ensemble of her figure expressed the perfect chastity of youth, while the charm of a mature womanly soul illuminated her features.

Her peculiar attire was precisely that of the naiad; a robe of floating tunic, made of some indescribable and

marvellous tissue whose soft folds seemed wet and clinging; an exquisitely wrought diadem, and showers of pearls were entwined in her magnificent hair, with that mixture of peculiar luxury and happy caprice which characterizes the taste of the renaissance; in singular and charming contrast to the altogether simple garment, and which evinced its richness only in the easy grace of its arrangement and the minute finish of the jewels, and delicate details of the coiffure.

I could have gone on looking at her all my life, without dreaming of addressing her. I did not observe the silence that had succeeded to the roar of the fountain, I do not even know whether I stood gazing at her for a moment or for an hour. It seemed to me of a sudden—as if I had always seen her, always known her—it was, perhaps, because I was living a century in a moment's space.

She was the first to speak. I heard but could not understand all at once, for the silvery tones of her voice, like her supernatural beauty, served to complete the illusion.

I listened as if to music, without seeking to attach any particular sense to her words.

At last I made an effort to shake off this stupor and heard her ask if I could see her. I know not what I answered, for she added :

“Under what guise, dost thou behold me?”

It was only then that I remarked she addressed me as “thou.” I felt myself drawn to reply in the same fashion, for if she spoke to me *en reine*, I addressed her as a divinity.

“I see thee,” I replied, “as a being to whom naught upon this earth can compare.”

It seemed to me that she blushed, for my eyes were becoming accustomed to the sea-green light which inundated her figure. I beheld her, white as a lily, with the fresh tint of youth upon her cheek, a melancholy smile added to her charms.

"What do you see extraordinary in me?" said she.

"Beauty," I replied, briefly. I was too much moved to add more.

"My beauty," answered she, "is an effect of the imagination; for it does not exist in a form that thou canst appreciate. All that is here of me is my mind. Address me then as a soul and not as a woman. About what did you wish me to advise you?"

"I no longer remember."

"And the cause of this forgetfulness?"

"Is thy presence."

"Try to remember."

"No, I do not wish to."

"Then, adieu!"

"No, no," I exclaimed, approaching her, as if to retain her, but I stopped short—terrified, for the light suddenly paled and the apparition seemed fading away.

"In the name of heaven, remain!" I went on, with anguish. "I am submissive, my love for you is chaste."

"What love?" she asked, reassuming her brilliancy

"What love? I know not. Did I speak of love? Oh, yes, I remember now. Yesterday I loved a woman and I wished to please her, to work her will at the risk of betraying my duty. If you are a pure essence, as I believe, you know everything. Must I then explain?"

"No, I know the facts that concern the posterity of

the family whose name I bear." "But I am no divinity, I cannot read souls, I did not know that thou lovedst."

"I love no one. At this moment I love nothing upon earth, and I would like to die if in another state of existence I could follow you."

"Thou talkest wildly. To be happy after death, it is necessary to have led a pure life. Thou hast a difficult duty to fulfill, and it is for this that thou hast summoned me. Perform thy duty then or thou wilt never see me more."

"What is this duty? Speak, henceforth I will obey none but thee."

"This duty," answered the naiad, leaning towards me and speaking so low that I could with difficulty distinguish her voice from the fresh murmur of the waters, "is to obey thy father. And, afterwards, thou shalt tell the generous woman who wishes to sacrifice herself, that those whom she pities will always bless her, but will never accept her sacrifice. I know their thoughts, for they have summoned and consulted me. I know that they are fighting for their honor, but that they do not fear what men call poverty. For proud souls there is no such thing as poverty. Say this to the lady who will question thee to-morrow, and yield not to the love that she inspires so far as to make thee betray the religion of thy family."

"I will obey, I swear. And, now reveal to me the secrets of eternal life. Where is your soul now? What different qualities has it acquired in this removal?"

"All that I can say is this : death does not exist—nothing dies ; but things in the outer world are very

different from what one imagines here. I will tell thee no more. Do not question me."

"Say at least if I shall see you in this other life."

"I know not."

"And in this?"

"Yes, shouldst thou prove worthy."

"I will prove worthy. But tell me this much, since you can direct and counsel those who live in this world, can you not pity them?"

"I can."

"And love them?"

"I love them all as brothers with whom I have lived."

"Love one then above the others. He will perform miracles of courage and virtue if you will but interest yourself in him."

"Let him perform these miracles and he will find me in his thoughts. Adieu!"

"Wait one moment! O heaven! One moment! It is said that you bestow a charmed ring upon those who have not offended you, as a pledge of your protection and as a means of evoking you. Is this true? And wilt you give it to me?"

"Vulgar minds alone believe in magic. Thou couldst never put faith therein, thou who speakest of eternal life and who seekest divine truth. By what means could a soul that communicates with thee without the aid of real organs bestow upon thee a material and palpable object?"

"Still I see a sparkling ring on your finger."

"I cannot perceive what thine eyes behold. What kind of a ring dost thou see?"

"A large circle with an emerald in the form of a star, set, in gold."

"It is strange thou shouldst see that," said she, after a moment's silence. "The involuntary workings of the human mind and the connection of its dreams with certain past deeds, perchance, include providential mysteries. The science of these inexplicable things belongs only to the One who knows the cause and the reason for everything. The hand that thou thinkest thou dost behold exists only in thine imagination. What is left of me in the tomb would fill thee with horror; but it may be that thou seest me such as I was on earth. Tell me how I appear to thee?"

I know not what enthusiastic picture I drew of her. She seemed to listen with attention and said :

"If I resemble this statue, that should not surprise thee for I acted as its model. Thus thou bringest back to my mind the memory of what I once was, and even the jewels thou dost describe, I remember having worn. The ring thou thinkest thou dost see I lost in a room that I occupied in this chateau. It fell between two stones under the hearth. I intended to have had the stone raised on the next day, but I died that very day. Shouldst thou search for it thou mayst perchance find it. In that case, I give it to thee as a souvenir of me and of the oath thou hast sworn to obey me. Behold, the day breaks, farewell!"

This farewell caused me the most acute pain I had ever experienced and I came near rushing forward once more to seize this shadowy enchantress, for by degrees I had approached near enough to be within reach of the hem of her garment, had I dared to touch it, but I had not the courage. It is true, I had forgotten the

threats of the legend against those who attempted this profanation. I was only held back, powerless, by a superstitious respect, but a cry of despair broke from my heart and vibrated even amid the marine shells, held by the tritons of the fountain. The shadow paused as if withheld by pity.

"What more dost thou desire?" said she. "Day approaches and I cannot remain."

"Why not, if such is thy will?"

"I am forbidden to again behold the sun of this earth. I dwell in the eternal light of a more beautiful world."

"Take me with thee to that world. I no longer wish to live in this. I will not remain here I swear, if I must never see thee more."

"Thou shalt see me again, have no fear," said she. Await till thou art worthy and until then, summon me not. I forbid thee. I will watch over thee like an invisible providence, and when thy soul is as pure as a ray of morning, I will then appear to thee, simply on the appeal of thy pious desire. Submit!"

"Submit!" repeated a solemn voice that resounded at my right. I turned and beheld one of the phantoms I had already seen in my room, at the time of the first apparition.

"Submit!" repeated a voice exactly similar, like an echo, at my left, and I beheld the second ghost.

I was not at all affected by this, although there was something terrifying in the height of these two spectres and in the deep tones of their voices. But what cared I for the terrible things I might see or hear? Nothing could snatch me from the ecstasy in which I was plunged. I did not even stop to look at these acces-

sory shadows; my eyes sought my celestial beauty. Alas! she had disappeared, and I no longer beheld aught save the motionless naiad of the fountain, with its passionless pose and its cold tones of marble rendered blue by the first rays of morning.

I know not what became of the sisters; I did not see them disappear. I went around and around the fountain like a madman. I thought I was sleeping and I grew bewildered in the confusion of my ideas, hoping that I would not awake.

But I remembered the promised ring, and went up to my room, where I found Baptiste, who spoke to me without my being able to gather the meaning of his words. He appeared worried, perhaps on account of my expression, but I never thought of questioning him. I looked at the hearth and soon observed two disconnected stones, which I endeavored to raise, but it was too difficult an undertaking without the necessary tools.

Baptiste probably thought me mad, and mechanically endeavoring to aid me—

“Has monsieur lost anything?” said he,

“Yes, I let one of my rings fall here yesterday.”

“A ring! Monsieur has no rings, I have never seen him wear one.”

“No matter. Let us try to find it.”

He took a knife and scraped the soft stone, to enlarge the crack, removed the ashes and powdered cement which filled it up, and while working thus to please me, he asked me what kind of a ring it was in the same tone he would have asked me what I had been dreaming about.

“It is a gold ring with a star formed of a large emerald,” I replied, with the coolness of certainty.

He no longer doubted, and detaching a rod from the window curtains, he bent it in the form of a hook and reached the ring, which he smilingly presented me. He thought without daring to say so, that it was a gift from Madame d'Ionis. As for myself, I scarcely looked at it, so sure was I that it was the same that I had seen on the finger of the ghost; it was, in fact, exactly like it. I put it on my little finger, never doubting that it belonged to the defunct demoiselle d'Ionis, or that I had seen the ghost of that marvelous beauty.

Baptiste showed a great deal of discretion in his behavior, and when he left me, made me promise to go to bed.

You can readily imagine such was far from my thoughts. I seated myself before the table, from which Baptiste had removed the famous supper of three loaves, and compelling myself to recall the details of my transporting vision, some parts of which I feared I might forget. I began to write a full account thereof, just as you have read it.

I remained in this state of agitation mingled with ecstasy, till the rising of the sun. At times I dozed a little, my elbows on the table, and thought I was again going through my dream; but it ever eluded me, and Baptiste came and dragged me from the solitude in which I would have gladly thenceforth have passed my life.

I arranged it so as to go down stairs, just as they were about to take their places at the table. I had not yet asked myself how I was to give an account of the vision; I thought of it while making believe breakfast, for I ate nothing and without feeling wearied or ill, I

experienced an unconquerable disgust for the functions of animal life.

The dowager who did not see very well, was not aware of my trouble. I answered her usual questions with the vagueness of the preceding days, but this time without acting any comedy, and with the preoccupation of a poet when questioned stupidly on the subject of his poem, and who gives evasive and ironical replies to get rid of stultifying investigations. I do not know if Madame d'Ionis was anxious or surprised to see me thus. I did not look at her, I did not even see her. I hardly understood what she was saying to me, during the mortal constraint of this breakfast.

At last I found myself alone in the library, awaiting her as on previous days, but without any impatience whatever. Far from it, I felt a lively satisfaction in sinking into a reverie. The weather was admirable; the sun kissed the trees and the blooming grounds beyond the large masses of transparent shadows that were projected by the architecture of the chateau on the nearest flowerbeds. I walked from one end of this vast hall to the other, stopping each time that I found myself before the fountain. The windows were closed and the curtains drawn on account of the heat. These curtains were of a soft shade of blue that I tried to imagine green, and in this artificial twilight which somewhat recalled that of my vision, I experienced an incredible sensation of happiness, and a species of delirious gayety.

I was talking aloud, and laughing without being aware of any cause, when I felt some one seize me rather roughly by the arm. I turned around and saw Madame d'Ionis, who had come in without my observing her.

"Come, answer me, look at me at least," said she with some impatience. "Are you aware that you frighten me, and that I no longer know what to think of you?"

"You have your wish," I answered, "I have tampered with my reason, I have become insane. But do not reproach yourself on that account; I am much happier thus, and do not wish to be cured."

"So," said she, scrutinizing me anxiously, "this apparition is not then an absurd story? At least, you think—you have seen it produced?"

"Better than I see you at this moment."

"Don't affect such an air of stupid pride—I do not doubt your words. Tell me all about it quietly."

"No, never! I implore you do not question me. I cannot, I do not wish to answer."

"Really the society of ghosts does not seem to agree with you, my dear sir, and you will make me think that you have heard some singularly flattering things, for you are as proud and discreet as a fortunate lover."

"Ah! what do you say, madame?" I cried, "No love is possible between two beings separated by the abyss of a tomb. But you know not of what you speak, you believe in nothing, you ridicule everything."

I was so rude in my enthusiasm, that Madame d'Ionis was rather vexed.

"There is one thing which I do not ridicule," said she quickly; and that is my law suit, and since you have promised on your honor, to consult a mysterious oracle and to obey its orders—"

"Yes," I replied, taking her hand with a familiarity that was quite out of place, but so quietly that she was not offended, so well did she understand the condition

of my mind ; “yes, madame, you must pardon my preoccupation and my forgetfulness. It was through devotion to you that I have played a very dangerous game, and I owe you at least an account of the result. I have been ordered to carry out my father’s intentions and make you win your suit.”

Whether she expected this answer, or whether she doubted my sanity, Madame d’Ionis showed neither surprise or disappointment. She contended herself with shrugging her shoulders, and shaking my arm as if to awake me.

“My poor child,” said she, “you have been dreaming, that is all. For a moment I shared your exaltation, I hoped at least that it would bring you back to the ideas of delicacy and justice that at heart you cherish. But I know not what exaggerated scruples or what habits of passive obedience to your father, have caused you to hear such chimerical words. Shake off these illusions, there have been no ghosts, nor has there been any mysterious voice, your head was affected by the indigestible perusal of that old manuscript, and by the abbé Lamyre’s doleful stories. I am going to explain how it all happened.”

She talked with me for some time ; but my efforts to listen and understand were in vain. At times it seemed as if she were speaking an unknown language. When she saw that the words that fell upon my ear were not communicated to my brain, she grew seriously alarmed about me, felt my pulse to see if I had any fever, asked me if my head ached, and begged me to go and lie down. I understood that she gave me permission to be alone and I gladly ran and threw myself upon my bed, not that I felt the least fatigue,

but because I kept thinking all the time that could I but sleep, I might again behold the celestial beauty of my immortal nymph.

I do not know how the rest of the day passed. I had no knowledge of it. The next morning I saw Baptiste walking through the room on tip-toe.

"What are you doing, *mon ami*?" I asked.

"I am sitting up with you, my dear master," he replied. "Thank God you have slept two good hours. You feel better, don't you?"

"I feel very well, have I then been ill?"

"You had a severe attack of fever last evening, and it lasted part of the night. It was the effect of the great heat. You never think of putting on your hat when you go in the garden. Yet *madame votre mère* gave you so many cautions about it."

Zéphyrine entered, asked about me with much interest and made me promise to take *another* spoonful of *my* soothing potion.

"Very well," said I, although I had no recollection of this potion. "a sick guest is an inconvenience and all I ask is to get well quickly."

The potion really did me a great deal of good, for I again fell asleep and dreamed of my immortal nymph. When I opened my eyes, I saw an apparition at the foot of my bed, which would have charmed me two nights ago, but which now vexed me like an importunate reproach. It was Madame d'Ionis, who came herself to see how I was, and to give her personal supervision to the efforts made in my behalf. She was very friendly, and showed real interest in me. I thanked her to the best of my ability and assured her that I was very well.

Upon this, appeared the solemn head of a physician, who examined my pulse and my tongue, prescribed rest, and said to Madame d'Ionis :

"It is nothing. Keep him from reading, writing and talking until to-morrow and he will then be able to return to his family."

Left alone with Baptiste, I questioned him.

"*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur," said he, "I don't exactly know what to say. It seems that the room where you were is considered haunted."

"The room where I was? Where then am I now?"

I looked around me and recovering from my stupor I at last recognized that I was not in "*la chambre aux dames*," but in another apartment of the chateau.

"As for me," continued Baptiste, who was of a very positive temperament. "I slept in the room and saw nothing. I don't believe any of these stories. But, when I heard you tormenting yourself during your fever, always talking about a beautiful lady who exists and who does not exist, who is dead and who lives—who knows what you haven't said about it. It was all so pretty sometimes that I wished to remember it, or that I knew how to write it down, in order to preserve it, but it did you harm, and I decided upon bringing you here, where you are better off. Don't you see, Monsieur, that this all comes from writing too many verses? Your father said rightly that it would turn your brain! You would do better to think only of your law papers."

"Thou art certainly right, my dear Baptiste," I answered "and I will try and take thine advice. In fact it does seem as if I had had an attack of madness."

"Of madness? Oh! no indeed, Monsieur. *Dieu*

merci. You have wandered a little in your fever just as it might happen to anyone ; but now that it is all over, if you will take a little chicken broth, your brain will be as clear as ever."

I resigned myself to the chicken broth, although I would have preferred something more nourishing so as to get well quickly. I was very weak, but little by little my strength came back during the day, and I was allowed a light supper. The following day, Madame d'Ionis came again to see me. I had risen and was feeling quite well. I talked very sensibly with her about what had happened, without however giving her any details upon the subject. I had been light-headed, I was much ashamed of it, and begged her to keep my secret ; my position as a lawyer would be lost if I acquired the reputation of a ghost seer ; and it would affect my father seriously.

" Fear nothing," said she ; " I will answer for the discretion of my people ; make sure of your valet's silence, and the story of this adventure will never leave the place. Besides, even should something of the kind be told, we would all be perfectly justified in saying that you had had an attack of fever, and that it pleased these superstitious souls to interpret it to suit their credulity. And really, this would only be the truth. You had a sun stroke coming here on horse-back on a scorching day. You were ill during the night. On the following days I tormented you with this unfortunate law suit, and I stopped at nothing to bring you over to my way of thinking."

She paused, and, in a different tone said :

" Do you remember what I said to you the day before yesterday in the library ? "

"I confess that I did not understand, I was under the influence."——

"Of the fever? I saw that very plainly."

"Will it please you to repeat to me, now that my head is no longer affected, what you were saying about apparitions?"

Madame d'Ionis hesitated,

"Has your memory preserved the idea of this apparition?" said she carelessly, but examining me rather anxiously.

"No," I replied, "it is very confused now, confused as a dream of which one is still conscious, but no longer cares to remember."

I lied boldly, Madame d'Ionis was deceived, and I saw that she also was lying, when she pretended having spoken to me in the library only about the effect of the manuscript, in order to blame herself for having lent it to me at a time when I was already greatly agitated. It was evident that through fear caused by my mental condition, she had on that evening said certain things, that she was very glad now I had not understood, but I could not imagine what they might be. She saw I was quite confused, so she believed me cured. I talked very decidedly about my vision as though it were the effect of a high fever. She made me promise to think no more of it, and never to torment myself about it.

"Don't go and think yourself more weak-minded than other people; there is no one in the world who has not had their hours of delirium. Remain with us two or three days longer, no matter what the doctor says. I do not like to send you back to your parents, so weak and pale. We will say nothing more about

the suit, it is useless ; I will go and see your father and talk it over with him; without worrying you any more about it."

By evening I was already cured, and I tried to get into my old room, it was shut up. I risked asking Zéphyrine for the key, who replied that it had been given to Madame d'Ionis. They did not wish to put anyone there, until the recently unearthed legend had again been buried in oblivion.

I pretended that I had forgotten something in the room. They had to yield. Zéphyrine went after the key and entered the room with me. I searched everywhere without saying what I was looking for. I examined the hearth and saw the fresh scratches on the disjointed stones, that Baptiste had left there with his knife. But what did this prove, save that in my madness I had caused a search for an object that existed only in the memory of a dream? I had thought that I had found a ring and had put it on my finger. It was there no longer, without doubt it had never been there !

I did not even dare to question Baptiste on this subject. They did not leave me one moment alone in the ladies' room, and they shut it up again, as soon as I went out. I felt that there was nothing to keep me at the Chateau d'Ionis, and I left by stealth the next morning so as to avoid the drive in a carriage with which they had threatened me.

The horse and the fresh air quite set me up again. I galloped rapidly through the woods that surrounded the chateau, fearing that I might be pursued by the solicitude of my beautiful hostess. I slackened my pace when two leagues distant, and arrived quietly at Angers during the afternoon,

My face was a little changed ; my father did not notice it much, but nothing escapes a mother's eye, and it worried mine. I succeeded in quieting her by eating with an appetite ; I had compelled Baptiste to give me his word that he would not say anything ; he had made it a condition however that he would not feel bound, should I chance to fall ill again.

But I took good care not to do so ; I watched over my physical and moral welfare like a youth bent upon the preservation of his existence. I worked, but not too much ; I took walks regularly, I dwelt upon no mournful ideas, I abstained from all reading of an exciting nature. The reason for all this had its source in an obstinate but tranquil mania and, so to speak, 'twas mistress of itself. I wanted to prove to my own judgment that I neither had been nor now was out of my mind, and that there was nothing more certain, in my opinion, than the existence of the green ladies. I also wished to restore my mind to that state of clearness necessary to conceal my secret and to nourish it internally as the source of my intellectual life and the criterion of my moral existence.

Every trace of the crisis then rapidly disappeared, and seeing me studious, reasonable and moderate in all things, it would have been impossible to guess that I was under the dominion of a fixed idea, of a well regulated monomania.

Three days after my return to Angers, my father sent me to Tours on some other business. I spent twenty-four hours there, and when I returned home, I learned that Madame d'Ionis had been there to have an understanding with my father about the consequences

of her law-suit. She had appeared to yield to positive reason ; she had consented to gain it.

I was glad that I had not met her. It would be impossible to say that so charming a woman had become repugnant to me, but it is certain that I feared more than I desired her presence. Her scepticism, which she appeared to have renounced one day only to overwhelm me with it on the next, had produced an injurious effect upon me, and had caused me inexpressible suffering.

At the end of two months, notwithstanding all the efforts I made to appear happy, my mother discovered the terrible sadness that permeated my mind. Everyone observed a great change for the better in me, and at first she was pleased with it. My manner of life was altogether austere, and my language as grave and sensible as that of an old magistrate. Without being devout, I professed to be religious. I no longer scandalized simple people by my voltarianism. I judged everything impartially and criticised without bitterness those of whom I did not approve. All this was edifying, excellent ; but I had no taste for anything, and I bore my life as if it were a burden. I was no longer young, I experienced no more the ecstasy of enthusiasm or the allurements of gayety.

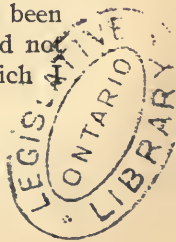
I had time then, notwithstanding my important occupations to write verses, and I would have made time in any case, even had none been allowed me, for I hardly slept any more and I sought none of those amusements that absorb three quarters of a young man's life. I no longer thought of love, I fled from the world, I ceased to parade myself with men of my age before the eyes of the beautiful ladies of the land. I

was retiring, meditative, austere, very gentle with my own people, very modest with everybody, very ardent in legal discussions. Thus I was esteemed an accomplished young man, but I was thoroughly unhappy.

And it was because I nourished with a strange stoicism, an insane passion without its parallel. I was in love with a ghost, I could not even say with a dead woman. All my historical researches resolved themselves into this. The three demoiselles d'Ionis had possibly never existed save in legend. Their history, fixed by the latest chroniclers at the period of Henri II, was already old and uncertain, even at that date. No evidence of them remained: no title, name or crest among the d'Ionis family papers that my father happened to have in his possession on account of the suit, not even a tombstone in any part of the country.

I was thus worshipping a pure fiction, engendered, to all appearance in the vapors of my brain. But this was precisely what I failed to be convinced of. I had seen and heard this marvel of beauty; she existed in a region that it was impossible for me to attain, but from which it was possible for her to descend to me. To solve the problem of this indefinable existence, and the mystery of the tie that bound us would have rendered me insane. I was conscious of the fact, I wished to explain nothing, to fathom nothing; I lived upon faith, which is "the evidence of things not seen," a sublime madness, if reason is only to be proved by the evidence of the senses.

My madness was not so puerile as might have been feared. I nursed it as a superior faculty and did not allow it to descend from the heights upon which



had enthroned it. Thus I abstained from another evocation, lest I should lose myself in the cabalistic pursuit of some chimera unworthy of me. The immortal maiden had said that "I must become worthy, if she were to live in my thoughts." She had not promised to reappear in the same form as I had seen her. She had said that this form did not exist and was but the product of my imagination caused by the elevation of my feelings towards her. I ought not then to torment my brain to reproduce her, for it might misrepresent her and cause some other image to obliterate her own. I wished to purify my life and cultivate the treasure of conscience, in the hope, that at some given time, this celestial figure would come to me of her own accord and talk to me in those cherished tones that through my unworthiness had been vouchsafed me for so short a time.

Under the influence of this mania, I was in the way of becoming a good man, and it was rather odd that I should be led to wisdom through madness. But all this was too subtle and too tense for human nature. This rupture of my soul with the rest of my being, and of my life with the temptations of youth, was gradually leading me on to despair, perhaps even to insanity.

So far I was only melancholy, and although very pale and very thin, I did not appear to be ill either physically or mentally when the turn came for the hearing of the case of d'Ionis versus d'Aillane. My father instructed me to prepare my speech for the following week. It was now about three months since I had left, on a morning in June for the fatal chateau d'Ionis,

CHAPTER V.

THE DUEL.

THE more time and attention we bestowed upon this unhappy suit, the more fully convinced were my father and myself that it was impossible to lose it. Two wills were brought forward in evidence ; one of which five years previous had been duly attested, signed and sealed, was in favor of M. d'Aillane. Being in straightened circumstances at this period, he had escaped from his difficulties by a sale of the real estate which he regarded as his own. The other will, discovered three years afterwards, by one of those strange chances which causes it to be said that life resembles a romance, suddenly impoverished the d'Aillanes to enrich Madame d'Ionis. The validity of this last deed was incontestable ; the date, later than that of the first one was clear and precise. M. d'Aillane pleaded the childish condition of the testator and the nature of the pressure M. d'Ionis had brought to bear upon him in his last hours. This latter argument was sufficiently apparent ; but the condition of dotage could not be proved in any manner whatever.

Besides, M. d'Ionis assumed, rightly, that d'Aillane, pressed by his creditors, had ceded the property to them for less than its real value, and he demanded what was for them a very considerable sum, since it represented the last wreck of his adversaries' fortune,

M. d'Aillane did not expect to succeed. He was conscious that his case was a weak one; but he was bent upon clearing himself from the accusation brought against him, of having known or even suspected the existence of a second will, of having engaged the person with whom it was deposited to keep it concealed for three years, and of having hastened to utilize the inheritance so as to practically escape from the consequences of the future. There had been besides a discussion upon the real value of the property, exaggerated more or less by the two parties in the debates, previous to my father's intervention in the suit.

My father and I were discussing this last point and were not quite of the same opinion, when Baptiste announced M. d'Aillane, the son, captain of the—— regiment.

Bernard d'Aillane was a handsome young man of about my age, proud, sensitive, and very outspoken. He expressed himself very politely, appealing to our honor, as one who recognized our strict observance thereof, but towards the close of his exordium, carried away by his natural vivacity, he distinctly threatened me, in case I should, in the course of my speech, chance to express any doubt of his father's perfect loyalty.

My father was more disturbed by this challenge than I, and a lawyer at heart, he expressed his indignation in words. I saw that a quarrel was likely to result from a project of reconciliation, and I begged the two speakers to listen to me.

"Permit me, father," said I, "to call M. d'Aillane's attention to the fact that he has just committed a serious imprudence, and that, if I were not, thanks to

my profession, of a cooler temperament than himself, I would take pleasure in provoking his anger, and in making use of every argument that my case might require."

"What do you say," cried my father, who in his heart was the most amiable of men, but easily carried away in the exercise of his duties, "I sincerely trust, my son, that you will use every argument, and if there is the least occasion in the world to suspect the good faith of our adversaries, it is neither M. le Capitaine d'Aillane's little moustache and little sword, or his father's great moustache and large sword that will prevent you from proclaiming it."

Young d'Aillane was perfectly infuriated, and being unable to vent his rage upon a man of my father's age, he was strongly tempted to vent it upon me. He made some very bitter remarks to me, of which I took no notice, and, continuing to address my father, I answered :

"You are perfectly right in believing that I will not allow myself to be intimidated ; but we must pardon M. d'Aillane for having entertained such an idea. Were I to find myself in a similar situation, and your honor in question, reflect, my dear father, that I would not be any more polite or reasonable than necessity required. Have some consideration then for his anxiety, and since we cannot relieve it, do not let us be so harsh as to add to it unnecessarily. I have examined the affair sufficiently to be convinced myself of the extreme delicacy of the entire d'Aillane family, and I shall consider it as much of a pleasure as of a duty to acknowledge this on all occasions."

"That is all I wanted, monsieur," cried the young

man, grasping my hands, "and now go on and gain your suit, we ask nothing better."

"One moment, one moment," replied my father, with the same spirit he showed in his discussions in court. "I do not know exactly, my son, what your ideas about this perfect loyalty may be, but as for myself, if I find circumstances in the history of this affair where it is manifest, there are others that seem suspicious to me, and I beg of you to promise nothing, before weighing the objections that I was engaged in submitting to you when monsieur honored us with his visit."

"Allow me, my dear father," I replied with firmness, "to inform you that slight appearances will not be sufficient to make me share your doubts. Without considering M. le comte d'Aillane's well-established reputation, I have the evidence of certain testimony in his favor."

I paused, while reflecting that this testimony of my sublime and mysterious friend, was something I would be unable to bring forward without being laughed at. It was nevertheless so serious a consideration with me, that nothing in the world, not even apparent facts, could make me doubt it.

"I know of what testimony you speak," said my father, "Madame d'Ionis has a great affection——."

"I hardly know Madame d'Ionis!" interrupted young d'Aillane quickly.

"And I am not speaking of you, monsieur," my father smilingly replied. "I am speaking of Count d'Aillane and of mademoiselle his daughter."

"And I, father," said I, in my turn, "I was not speaking of Madame d'Ionis."

"May one ask," said young d'Aillane, "the name of the person who has had this fortunate influence over you, so that I may know to whom I owe my gratitude?"

"With your permission, monsieur, I would prefer not to tell you, this is something that concerns myself alone."

The young captain begged my pardon for being so indiscreet, took leave of my father rather coldly, and retired, expressing his gratitude to me for my good will.

I followed him to the street door, as if out of politeness. There he again gave me his hand; this time I withdrew mine and begged him to come for one moment into my room which opened on to the vestibule. I once more declared that I was convinced of the nobility of his father's sentiments, and thoroughly determined not to cast the slightest aspersion on the honor of his family. After which I said :

"As this matter is settled, monsieur, you will permit me to ask you why you should have insulted me, by doubting my pride so far as to threaten me with your resentment. If I have not done so before my father, who seemed to urge me on, it was because I knew that when his feeling of anger will have passed away, he would consider himself the most unfortunate of men. I have also a very tender mother, and for this reason I ask you to keep our explanation here a secret. Charged with the interests of Madame d'Ionis, I plead her cause to-morrow ; I beg of you then, to grant on the following day, after leaving the palace, the meeting that I now ask of you."

"No, *parbleu* ! I will do nothing of the kind,"

cried the young man, throwing his arms around my neck. "I haven't the least desire to kill a fellow who has shown so much feeling and justice towards me. I was wrong, I acted without reason, and I am now quite ready to beg your pardon."

"That is altogether useless, monsieur, for you were forgiven before. In my position, one is exposed to such offenses, and they do not affect an honest man, but there is none the less necessity for me to fight you."

"*Oui—da ! Et pourquoi diable*, after having begged your pardon ?"

"Because that has been done in private, and your visit has been public. There is your horse pawing the ground at our door, and your soldier in uniform, attracting the attention of everyone. You know very well what a little provincial town is. In one hour from now, all the world will know that a brilliant officer has been here to threaten a little lawyer, who is conducting a suit against him, and you may be pretty sure that, to-morrow, when I shall have observed for you and yours all the consideration I look upon as your due, more than one malicious soul will accuse me of being afraid of you, and will laugh at the contemptible figure I will cut beside you. I resign myself to this humiliation, but this duty accomplished, I will have another to fulfill which will be to prove that I am no coward, unworthy of practicing an honorable profession, and capable of betraying the confidence of my clients through fear of a sword thrust. Consider that I am very young, monsieur, that I have a character to establish, now or never."

"You make me realize my mistake," answered M.

d'Aillane. "I did not appreciate the importance of my behavior, and I owe you a formal avowal in public."

"It will be too late, after my speech, they will always believe that I have yielded to fear; and it will be too soon before; they might think that you feared my revelations."

"Then I see there is no way out of this difficulty, and that all I can do for you, is to give you the satisfaction that you require. Depend upon my word and my silence. On leaving the palace to-morrow, you will find me at whatever place you may appoint."

We made our arrangements. After which the young officer observed with a mournful and affectionate air:

"This is a bad piece of business for me, monsieur, for should I be so unfortunate as to kill you, I believe I would then kill myself for having placed a man of so much feeling as yourself in a position, where he must of necessity stake his life against mine. God grant that the result may not prove too serious. It will be a lesson for me. And meanwhile, whatever happens, bear in mind my repentance, and do not have too poor an opinion of me. It is too true that the world brings us up badly, we young men of family. We forget that the *bourgeoisie* is as good as we are, and that the time has come to recognize this fact. Come, give me your hand now, while we prepare to cut each other's throats!"

Madame d'Ionis was to come to town the next day to be present at the trial. I had received several very friendly letters from her in which she no longer strove to influence my sense of duty as a lawyer, and in which she contented herself with advising me to respect the

honor of her relatives, who could not, she said, be despised or offended without reflecting disgrace upon herself. It was easy to see that she counted upon her presence to restrain me, in case I should be carried away by oratorical fervor.

She was mistaken in thinking that she exercised any power over me. I was now governed by a higher influence, by a souvenir of an altogether different nature than her own.

Again I conversed with my father in the evening and prevailed upon him to leave me at liberty to take my own view of the moral side of the affair. He bade me good-night, saying at the same time in rather a reproving tone, which I understood no more than I did his words :

“My dear child, have a care. Madame d’Ionis is thine oracle I know, but I greatly fear that she is only making use of thee to advance the interests of another.” And as he observed my astonishment, he added :

“We will talk that over later on. Think only of acquitting thyself well to-morrow, and of doing honor to thy father.”

Just as I was getting into bed, I was surprised to see a bow of green ribbon pinned to my pillow. I took it up and felt that it contained a ring ; it was the emerald star which I remembered but as a feverish dream. This mysterious ring really existed then ; it had been given back to me.

I put it on my finger and touched it a hundred times to assure myself that I was not the victim of an illusion ; then I took it off and examined it with a care which I had not been equal to in the Castle of Ionis,

and there deciphered this device in very ancient characters :

“Thy life belongs to me alone.”

Was it a command for me not to fight? Was the immortal nymph still unwilling for me to rejoin her? This was a great blow to me, for I was consumed with a thirst for death, and I had hoped that circumstances would authorize me to rid myself of life without being either rebellious or cowardly.

I rang for Baptiste whom I could still hear walking around the house.

“Come,” said I, “thou must tell me the truth, *mon ami*, for thou art an honest man, and my reason is in thy hands. Who has been here this evening? Who has put this ring in my room, on my pillow?”

“What ring, monsieur? I have seen no ring.”

“But don’t you see it now? Isn’t it on my finger? Haven’t you already seen it at the château d’Ionis?”

“Certainly, monsieur, I see it and recognize it perfectly. It is the same one that you lost over there and that I found between two tiles; but I swear upon my honor, that I don’t know how it came here, and when I turned down your bed I saw nothing on your pillow.”

“Perhaps thou canst tell me one thing at least, that I have never dared to ask thee since that fever that made me delirious for several hours. Who was it that took this ring away from me at the castle d’Ionis?”

“I know no more than you, monsieur. Seeing that it was not on your finger I thought you had hidden it—so that you might not compromise—.”

“Whom? Explain thyself.”

“*Dame*, monsieur; did not Madame d’Ionis give it to you?”

"Certainly not."

"To be sure, monsieur is not bound to tell me. But it must be she who sent it back to you."

"Hast thou seen any one from her house here to-day?"

"No, sir, no one. But whoever carried out the directions, nevertheless, knows the ways of the house."

As I saw that I would gain nothing by the examination of material things, I bade Baptiste good night and gave myself up to my accustomed reveries. This affair could no longer be explained naturally. This ring contained the secret of my destiny. I was grieved to disobey my immortal nymph, and at the same time I was happy in thinking that she was keeping her promise of watching over me.

I did not close my eyes that night. My poor head was sick as well as my heart. Ought I to disobey the arbitress of my destiny? Ought I to sacrifice my honor to her? I was too much involved with M. d'Aillane to retract my words. At times I entertained the thought of suicide so that I might escape from the torment of an existence which I no longer understood, and then I comforted myself with the idea that this terrible and delightful device—"Thy life belongs to me alone"—did not have the same meaning that I had at first supposed, and I resolved to pay no attention to it, persuading myself that the maiden would appear to me at the place of meeting, if she wished to prevent it.

But why did she not now appear to me in person if she wished to put an end to my perplexities? I called upon her with the ardor of despair.

"The trial is too long and too cruel," said I, "it

will cost me my life and my reason. If I must live for thee, if I belong to thee——.

A loud rapping at the street door made me tremble. It was not yet daylight. I was the only one in the house awake. I dressed myself hurriedly. A second knock was heard, then came a third, just as I rushed into the vestibule.

I opened the door all in a tremble. I know not what connection there was in my mind between this nocturnal visit and the cause of my anguish; but whoever the visitor might be, I had a presentiment that all would now be satisfactorily arranged. And such proved to be the case, although I could not then understand the connection with subsequent events that were soon to extricate me from my position.

The visitor was one of Madame d'Ionis servants who came post haste with a letter for my father or for myself, as it was addressed to both.

While they were getting up in the house to answer the summons, I read the following: "Stop the law suit. I have this moment received and now transmit to you a serious piece of news which releases you from your engagements with M. d'Ionis. He is no more. You will receive the official tidings during the day."

I carried the letter to my father.

"*A la bonne heure!*" said he. "This is a fortunate piece of business for our beautiful client, if this disagreeable dead man does not leave her too many debts; a fortunate thing, too, for the d'Aillanes. The court will lose the opportunity of rendering a fine judgment, and thou that of making a fine speech. Come—let us go to sleep again, since there is nothing better to do."

He turned over towards the wall ; then called me back as I was leaving the room.

"My dear child," said he, "one thing worries my mind, and that is if you are in love with Madame d'Ionis, and if she is left penniless"—

"No, no, father," I cried, "I am not in love with Madame d'Ionis."

"But you have been? Come, speak the truth, and that is the cause of this change for the better in thee. The ambitious tastes which thou hast developed and the melancholy which worries thy mother so much"—

"Certainly," said my mother, who had been awakened by the knocking at such an unaccustomed hour, and who came into the room in her nightcap while we were talking, "be sincere now, my dear son. You love this beautiful lady and I even think you are beloved by her? Well then, confess to your parents."

"I am perfectly willing to confess," I replied, kissing my mother. "I was in love with Madame d'Ionis for two days; but I was cured on the third day."

"Upon your honor?" said my father.

"Upon my honor."

"And the reason for this change?"

"Do not ask me, I cannot tell you."

"I know the reason," said my father, laughing and yawning at the same time, "it is because little Madam d'Ionis and this handsome cousin 'who doesn't know her.' But this is no time for gossip upon such subjects. It is only five o'clock, and since my son will neither make love or make speeches to-day, I intend to sleep all the morning."

Relieved from anxiety concerning the duel, I took a

little rest. During the day, the news of M. d'Ionis' decease, which took place at Vienna fifteen days before (news did not travel so quickly then as now), was published in the city, and the suit suspended in view of a speedy arrangement between the parties concerned.

In the evening we received a visit from young d'Aillane. He came to beg my father's pardon, and this time I granted it gladly. Notwithstanding the serious manner in which he spoke of M. d'Ionis' death, we could easily see that he concealed his joy with difficulty. He took supper with us ; after which he followed me into my room.

"My dear friend," said he, "for you must allow me to call you such henceforth, I would like to unburden my heart to you, which overflows in spite of myself. You do not consider me so interested, I hope, as to think I am so wild with joy, over the close of this suit. The secret of my happiness"—

"Don't speak of it," said I, "we know it, we have guessed it."

"And why should I not speak of it to you, who deserve so much esteem and inspire so much affection? Do not think that you are a stranger to me. It is now three months since I have been giving an account of all your actions and your successes to"—

"To whom, pray?"

"To Madame d'Ionis. She was very anxious about you for some time after your stay at her house. To such an extent that I became jealous. She reassured me on that point, however, by explaining to me that you were seriously ill there for twenty-four hours."

"Then," said I, with some anxiety, "as she has no

secrets from you, she must have told you the cause of those hours of delirium?"

"Yes, don't worry yourself about it; she has told me everything, and without either of us thinking of making light of it. On the contrary, we were very sad over it, and Madame d'Ionis reproached herself for allowing you to tamper with certain ideas of a dangerous nature. All that I know about it myself, is that though I may swear like a trooper that I do not believe in the green ladies, I would never have had sufficient courage to summon them a second time. And, besides, if they had appeared I would have certainly broken everything in the room, and you whom I so stupidly irritated yesterday, your bravery, as regards supernatural affairs, far excels my curiosity."

This amiable youth, who was then on leave of absence came to see me every day, and we soon grew very intimate. He could not show himself yet at the château d'Ionis, and he awaited with impatience the time when his beloved and beautiful cousin would permit him to present himself, after she had consecrated the first period of mourning, *aux convenances*. He would have preferred taking up his abode in some town nearer her residence, but she had forbidden him to do so in due form, unwilling to rely upon the prudence of a *fiancé* so much in love.

Besides, he said that he had business at Angers, although he could not explain what it was, and he did not appear to interest himself much in it, as he passed all his time with me.

He told me all about his love affair with Madame d'Ionis. They had been destined for each other and their love had been mutual from infancy. Caroline

had been sacrificed to ambition and placed in a convent to break up their intimacy. They had seen each other secretly before and since her marriage with M. d'Ionis. The young captain did not consider himself bound to make any mystery of it, as their relations had been always of a perfectly pure nature.

"Had it been otherwise," said he, "I would not be quite so confiding."

His confidences, which I had at first repelled, ended by winning me over. His was one of those frank and open natures which no one could resist. He questioned me persistently, and seemed to understand the art of doing so without appearing either curious or importunate. You could not help feeling that he was really interested in you, and that he wished those whom he loved to be as happy as himself.

I allowed myself then to go as far as to tell him the whole of my story, and even to confess the strange passion that dominated me. He listened to me very seriously and assured me he saw nothing absurd in my love. Instead of trying to make me forget it, he advised me to complete the task I had set myself of becoming a good and worthy man.

"When you have accomplished this," said he, "either some miracle will happen to you, or rather your mind, no longer perturbed, will recognize that it has wandered in pursuit of some sweet chimera; some still sweeter reality will then replace it, and your virtues as well as your talents will none the less prove blessings of inestimable value."

"Never," I replied, "I will never love another than the heroine of my dream."

And in order to prove to him how all my thoughts

were absorbed, I showed him the verses and prose that I had written under the empire of this exclusive passion. He read and reread them with the frank enthusiasm of friendship. Had I been willing to accept his decision, I would have thought myself a great poet. He soon knew the best pieces in my collection by heart, and recited them to me with fervor, in our walks to the old castle of Angers and in the charming environs of the city. I resisted his desire that they should be printed. I could make verses for my own pleasure and for the relief of my troubled soul, but it would not answer for me to seek the renown of a poet. At that period, and among the people with whom I lived, it would have cast great discredit upon my profession.

At last the day came when he was allowed to make his appearance at the château d'Ionis, which Caroline had never left during the three months of her widowhood. He received a letter from her and read me the postscript. I was invited to accompany him in terms at once ceremonious and affectionate.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

WE reached our destination on an evening in December. The ground was covered with snow, and the sun was setting in superbly shaded violet clouds, but with an air of melancholy. I did not wish to interfere with the first effusions of two lovers' hearts, and so ordered Bernard to precede me to the château. Besides, I needed the sole companionship of my thoughts for the first few moments. It was not without a great emotion that I again beheld the spot where I had lived centuries in the space of three days.

I threw Baptiste the reins of my horse, and he proceeded towards the stables, while I went in alone through one of the small doors of the park.

This beautiful spot, stripped of its flowers and verdure, had now a grander character. From the sombre pines, frosty showers fell upon my head, and the branches of the old lindens, clad in ice formed delicate arcades of crystal, above the arbor of the alleys. One might have thought them the naves of a gigantic cathedral offering all the caprices of an unknown and fantastic architecture. But I again found Spring in the rotunda of the library. They had separated it from the contiguous galleries by fitting the arches with

glass windows, so as to make a sort of temperate hot-house. The waters of the fountain still murmured amid exotics that were even more beautiful than those I had seen before, and this flowing water, whilst without all sources slept enchained in ice, delighted alike the eye and ear.

It was with some difficulty that I decided to look at the Naiad. I found her less beautiful than the memory left me of her whose form and features she recalled. Then, gradually, I began to admire and love it, as one cherishes a portrait which in general appearance and in some of the features at least, resembles a beloved one. My feelings had been contained and over excited for so long a time that I burst into tears and, overwhelmed with emotion, remained seated on the spot where I had beheld one whom I no longer hoped to see.

The sound of a silken robe caused me to raise my head, and I saw before me a very tall and slender woman, but of most graceful mien, who regarded me anxiously. For an instant I confounded her with my vision, but the darkness which was rapidly advancing prevented me from clearly distinguishing her face, and besides a woman in panniers and furbelows so little resembles a nymph of the renaissance, that my illusions were quickly dispelled, and I arose to salute her simply as a mortal.

She also bowed, hesitated for an instant to address me, then decided to do so, and I trembled at the sound of her voice which penetrated to the very core of my being. 'Twas the silvery voice, the voice without its equal upon earth, of the divinity. And I was dumb and incapable of replying. As when in the presence

of my immortal nymph, I was too bewildered to understand what she was saying.

She seemed greatly embarrassed by my silence, and I made an effort to shake off this absurd stupor. She asked me if I were not M. Just Nivières.

"Yes, madame," I at last answered. "I beg of you to pardon my preoccupation. I was a little indisposed, I was dozing."

"No," replied she with adorable sweetness, "you were weeping! That was what drew me here from the gallery where I was awaiting the signal of my brother's arrival."

"Your brother?"

"Yes, your friend, Bernard d'Aillane."

"So you are Mademoiselle d'Aillane?"

"Félicie d'Aillane, and I dare affirm your friend also, although you do not know me and I am seeing you for the first time. But the high opinion my brother has of you and all that he has written about you have caused me to feel a sincere interest in you. So it was with real sorrow and anxiety that I heard you sobbing. *Mon dieu!* I hope that you are not grieving over any family affliction; if your worthy parents of whom I have also heard so much good, were in trouble, you would not be here."

"Thank God," I replied, "I have no cause to distress myself about any of those dear to me, and the personal grief that I experienced just now was dispelled by the sound of your voice, by the sweet words you have spoken. But how does it happen that having such a sister as you, Bernard should never have mentioned it?"

"Bernard is absorbed by an affection of which I am

not in the least jealous, and that I very well understand, for madame is a tender sister to me. But did you not come with him, and how is it that I find you here alone and unannounced?"

"Bernard went on before me."

"Ah! I understand. Well, let us leave them together a little longer; they have so much to say to each other, and their attachment is so noble, so fraternal, and of such long standing. But come by the fire in the library, for it is rather chilly here."

I saw that she did not think it proper to remain with me in the dark, and I followed her regretfully. I feared to see her face, for her voice deluded me into the belief that my immortal nymph was stopping to converse in common language with me, on details that concerned the world of the living.

There was a fire and light in the library, and I could then see her features, which were marvelously beautiful and which in a vague fashion recalled those that I had thought well fixed in my mind. But while scrutinizing them as closely as politeness would permit, I realized that the three images of the Naiad, the phantom and that of Mademoiselle d'Aillane were so confused in my mind, that it was impossible for me to separate them so as to render to each one the admiration that was its due. It was the same type, of that I was very sure; but I could no longer decide what constituted the difference, and I perceived with fear this uncertainty of my memory in regard to the sublime apparition. I had brooded over it too much. I had put too much faith in seeing it again. It no longer appeared to me save through a cloud.

And then, after several moments, I forgot my

anguish in the sole contemplation of Mademoiselle d'Aillane, beautiful as the purest and most elegant of Diana's nymphs, and as frankly affectionate with me as a child who confides in a sympathetic face. There was, so to speak, a shining purity about her, an adorable expansion of heart without the least thought of coquetry ; and no trace whatever of the always rather reserved manners that a young girl of quality was in the habit of observing when conversing with a *bourgeois*. It seemed as if I were a relative, a friend of her childhood with whom she was renewing her acquaintance after a separation of several years. Her limpid gaze was not at all like the concentrated fire of Madame d'Ionis. It was a serene light like that of the stars. Impressionable and nervous as I had become in consequence of so many exciting vigils, I felt rejuvenated, rested, and deliciously refreshed under this benign influence. She conversed without art, and without pretention, but with a natural distinction and clearness of judgment which evinced a moral education far above what was then regarded as sufficient for women of her rank. She had none of their prejudices, and it was with angelic good faith and even with a certain generous childish enthusiasm that she accepted the conquests of the philosophical mind that was drawing us, without our knowledge, towards a new era.

But above all she possessed an irresistible charm of sweetness, and I at once succumbed to its influence without a struggle. Without remembering that in the secrecy of my soul, I had pronounced a sort of monastic vow which consecrated me to the worship of an impalpable ideal.

She spoke openly of the joys and sorrows of her family, of the part that I had played in the events of these latter days, and of the gratitude that she considered she owed me for the way in which I had spoken to Bernard of her father's honor.

"Since you know all these things then, you ought to appreciate all it has cost me to take sides against you."

"I know everything," said she, "even about the duel that you came near having with my brother. *Hélas!* he was entirely in the wrong, but he is of a nature that rises after committing a mistake, and his esteem for you dates from that time. My father, whose affairs have kept him in Paris all this time, will soon be here, and longs to tell you that henceforth he looks on you as one of his own children. You will like him, I am sure ; he is a man of superior mind and of corresponding character."

As she spoke thus, the noise of a carriage and the barking of dogs without caused her to start from her chair.

"It is he!" she cried, "I will wager it is he who is coming ! Come with me to meet him."

I followed her, much excited. She had put the candlestick in my hand and had run before me, so slight and lissome was she, that no sculptor could have conceived a purer ideal of nymph or goddess. I was already accustomed to seeing this ideal creature, costumed in the fashion of the day. Besides her toilette was of an exquisite taste and simplicity. I fancied I could even trace a symbolical resemblance in the color of her changeable silk dress, which was creamy white, with shadows of delicate green.

"Here is M. Nivières," said she, presenting me to her father, when she had joyfully embraced him.

"Ah, ah!" he replied in a tone that seemed strange to me, and that would have troubled me, had he not at once come towards me, stretching out both hands with a cordiality no less surprising, "do not be astonished at my pleasure in seeing you, you are the friend of my son, consequently my own, and I know your value through him."

Madame d'Ionis and Bernard now ran forward; I found Caroline beautified by happiness. Some moments afterwards we all met again at the table, with the abbé Lamyre, who had arrived that morning, and the good Zéphyrine, who had closed the eyes of the dowager d'Ionis several weeks before, and who wore mourning like everyone else in the house. The d' Aillanes not being related to the d'Ionis, except by marriage, could dispense with a formality that would have seemed only an act of hypocrisy on their part.

The supper was not lively. They were forced to abstain from gayety and expansiveness before the servants, and Madame d'Ionis realized so well the exigencies of her situation, that she restrained herself without effort and kept her guests up to the same pitch. The hardest person to silence was the abbé Lamyre; he could not resist his habit of humming two or three couplets, in the style of a philosophical *résumé*, during the conversation.

Notwithstanding this sort of constraint, joy and love were in the air of this household, where no one could reasonably regret M. d'Ionis, and where the contracted ideas, and shallowness of the dowager's heart had left a very small vacancy. We inhaled a perfume of hope

and of delicate tenderness which penetrated my very soul, and which I wondered did not sadden me—I, who was betrothed to eternal solitude.

It was true that since my intimacy with Bernard I had made rapid strides towards recovery. His character was so enterprising that, in spite of myself, he had snatched me from my mournful reflections; and in possessing himself of my secret he had also released me from the fatal influence which was drawing me to a separation from all other ties.

“A secret without a confidant is a mortal illness,” he had said, and he had listened to all my vagaries, without appearing to perceive my madness; sometimes he had seemed to share it, sometimes he had skillfully suggested doubts that had won me over to his way of thinking. I had come to think, a greater part of the time, that were it not for the inexplicable fact of the ring, my imagination alone was responsible for all my fantastic adventures.

I found in M. d’Aillane all the superiority of heart and mind that his children had spoken of. He evinced a sympathy for me, to which I responded with all my soul.

We separated as late as possible. As for myself, when twelve o’clock struck and Madame d’Ionis gave the signal for a general good evening, I experienced a sensation of grief as if I had fallen from delicious dreams into sombre reality. I had for so long a time reversed the order of life, regarding it as a dream, and dreams as waking, that the dread of being again alone was actually a terrible shock, and thoroughly unnerved me.

I certainly did not as yet wish to admit that I could

love another ; but it was certain that without thinking myself in love with Mademoiselle d'Aillane, I had an extraordinarily friendly feeling for her. I had observed her very carefully when she was not addressing me, and the more familiar I grew with her beauty, which was of an uncommon order, the more I was assured that I again experienced the same sensations awakened by the adorable phantom ; only this was a gentler fascination and imparted a wonderful sense of spiritual bliss. That clear countenance inspired absolute confidence and a sentiment of tranquil ardor resembling faith.

Bernard, who had no more idea of going to sleep than myself, talked with me until two o'clock in the morning. We had lodged in the same room, no longer "*la chambre aux dames*," nor even the one where I had been ill, but a pretty apartment decorated in the style of Boucher, with the rosiest and gayest of designs. There had been no more question of the green ladies than if we had never heard them mentioned. While Bernard was talking to me about his dear Caroline, he asked me what opinion I had formed of his dear Félicie. At first I did not know how to answer him. I feared to say too much or too little. I evaded the question by asking him, in my turn, why he had spoken to me so little of her.

"Is it possible," I said, "that you like her less than she likes you?"

"I would be a strange animal," he replied, "if I did not adore my sister. But you were so taken up with certain ideas, that you would not even have listened to my praises of her. And then, situated as we were at that time, my sister and myself, it would not

have looked very well for me to appear as if I were proposing her to you."

"And how could you have had the appearance of doing me such an honor."

"Ah! because a singular fact exists that I have been many times on the point of mentioning to you and that you must have certainly already remarked, the surprising resemblance between Félicie and the nymph of Jean Goujon whom you were so much in love with as to bestow its features upon your phantom."

"Then I was not mistaken," I exclaimed, "mademoiselle is a beautiful counterpart of this statue."

"Beautiful! thank you for her. But you see that you are impressed by this resemblance; and that is the reason why I refrained from mentioning it beforehand."

"I understand, you feared suggesting pretensions—that I cannot indulge in."

"I feared to be the means of your falling in love with a young person who could not aspire to a union with yourself; and that is all I feared. As long as the state of Madame d'Ionis' fortune is not known, we must consider ourselves poor. Your father and mine fear that her husband has left nothing, and that in appointing her universal legatee, he has only made her the victim of a bad joke. In that case we will never accept the little fortune that she wishes to give up to us, and to which our rights may be disputed, as you well know. I shall marry her all the same, since we love each other, but I will not allow her to bestow the smallest piece of property upon me in this contract. Then, my sister, without any dowry whatever—for my wife will not be rich enough to give her one, and

Félicie will never permit her to inconvenience herself on her account—is resolved to become a nun.”

“A nun, she? Never! Bernard, you must never consent to such a sacrifice.”

“Why not, my dear friend?” said he, with a feeling of sadness and pride that I could well understand. My sister has been brought up with this idea, and she has always shown a taste for seclusion.”

“You mustn’t think of such a thing! It is impossible for one so accomplished not to condescend to constitute the happiness of some honest man; it is still more impossible that no such honest man should be found who would beg her to bestow this happiness upon him!”

“I do not say that such may not be the case. That is a question that the future will solve, and should Madame d’Ionis have some money, I would not put any obstacles in the way of her giving my sister a dowry, modest but sufficient for the simplicity of her tastes. Only, we know nothing as yet, and in any case it would come with very bad grace from me, to say to you, ‘I have a charming sister, who embodies your ideal.’ That would have been as much as to say, ‘Think about it.’ It would have been throwing a girl at your head who was much too proud ever to consent to enter any family richer than her own, by means of a young poet’s exaltation. Now, what I then thought, I still think, and I beg of you seriously my dear friend, not to lay too much stress upon my sister’s resemblance to the Naiad.”

I was silent for a moment; then feeling, in spite of myself, that this warning troubled me more than I could have believed, I said with brusque sincerity :

"Why then, my dear Bernard, did you bring me here?"

"Because I thought my sister had left. She was to have rejoined my father at Tours, and he was not expected here for a fortnight. Events have frustrated my plans. I am none the less easy on my sister's account, knowing what kind of a man you are."

"Are you as easy on my account, Bernard?" said I, in a reproachful tone.

"Yes," he replied, with some emotion, "I am easy because you have sufficient strength of mind to say to yourself, this: A girl of heart and of worth has a right to be sued for by a man whose heart is free, and she would not feel much flattered some day to discover that she only owed this distinction to a chance resemblance."

I so well understood this answer that I added no more, and I resolved not to look too much at Mademoiselle d'Aillane, lest I should deceive myself. I even determined to go away, lest I should end by being too much disturbed by this fatal resemblance, and my fears were justified on the following day.

I felt that I was falling frantically in love with Mademoiselle d'Aillane, that the vision of the Naiad was fading in her presence, and that Bernard perceived the fact with anxiety.

I took my leave, pretending that my father had only allowed me twenty-four hours liberty. I had decided to open my heart to my parents, and to ask their permission* to offer my soul and life to Mademoiselle d'Aillane. I did so, with the greatest sincerity. The recital of my past sufferings made my father laugh and my mother weep. However, when I had thoroughly

described the state of despair, into which at times I had fallen, and which had made me contemplate the idea of suicide with a species of rapture, my father grew serious again, and cried, while he looked at my mother :

“So, here is a child who has been a victim of monomania under our very eyes, and we never suspected it ! And you thought, *mamie*, that he was hiding his flame for the beautiful d’Ionis who is so thoroughly alive, while he was wasting away for the beautiful d’Ionis who is dead, if it so be that she ever lived ! Truly strange things come to pass in poet’s brains, and I was perfectly right to mistrust this devilish poetry from the very first. Well, let us give thanks to the beautiful d’Aillane who resembles the Naiad and who has cured our madman. We must marry him at any cost, and we must ask for her at once, before it is known whether she will have a dowry, for should such be the case she will consider herself too grand a lady to marry a lawyer. Why the deuce didn’t Madame d’Ionis confide the case of the liquidation to me ? We would know how to act better than this old Parisian lawyer, who won’t get through with it in six months. Do they ever really work in Paris ? They mix themselves up in politics and neglect their business.”

The following day, my father and I returned to Ionis. Our request was submitted to M. d’Aillane, who began by embracing me, after which he gave his hand to my father and said, with an air of thoroughly chivalric frankness :

“Yes, *and thank you !*”

I threw myself again into his arms and he added :

“Wait, however, until my daughter consents, for

above all I desire her happiness. As to myself, I give her to you without knowing whether she will be rich enough for you; for if she should be, I have decided that you are noble enough for her. You are incurring every risk. *Eh bien, mordieu!* I wish to do as much and not fall behind the example you set me. You have no ambition for money, and for my part I have no prejudices in favor of nobility. So we both agree. I have your word and you have mine. Only I insist upon my daughter deciding the matter. And my dear M. Nivières, you must allow your son to pay his own addresses, for his love is so recent, that it depends upon him to prove its sincerity. As to his character and his talents, with those we are familiar, and there can be no objections on that score."

I was thus allowed to become a constant visitor at the château d'Ionis, and this was, as regards the past, the happiest time of my life. I loved, under the ordinary conditions of life, a being above the ordinary region of life, an angel of goodness, of sweetness, of intelligence and of ideal beauty.

She did not leave me without hope and freely expressed her esteem and sympathy for me, but when I spoke of love, she seemed doubtful.

"Do not deceive yourself," said she, "have you never loved, before you met me, and more than you loved me, a certain lady whose name my brother has refused to tell me?"

One day she said to me :

"Do you not wear on your finger, a certain ring that you regard as a talisman, and if I were to ask you to throw it into the fountain, would you obey me?"

"Certainly not," I exclaimed, "I will never part with it, for it was you who gave it to me."

"I, what do you mean by that?"

"Yes, it was you, do not try to conceal it any longer. It was you who enacted the role of the green lady to please Madame d'Ionis, who wished through you to pronounce her own ruin, and who thought she had found in me the person 'worthy of belief,' whose testimony her husband required. It was you who, yielding to her idea, appeared before me in fantastical guise, and prescribed my duty in conformity with your delicacy and pride of soul."

"Well, yes, it was I!" she said. "It was I who came near destroying your reason, and who repented bitterly on learning too late, how much you had suffered from this romantic adventure. Once before they had tried you in a ghost scene, with which I had nothing to do. When they saw how brave you were, more courageous than the abbé Lamyre, upon whom Caroline had played a similar trick, to amuse herself, they thought they could treat you to an apparition, in which there would be nothing very terrifying. I happened to be here, secretly, as the dowager d'Ionis would not willingly have suffered my presence. Caroline, struck with my resemblance to the nymph of the fountain, conceived the idea of arranging my hair and dressing me in a similar style so that I should deliver my oracle in due form. Although the dictum was not such as she desired, it was nevertheless one that you have obeyed religiously, in not forgetting the care of our honor for a single moment. I left the next morning, and they kept me in ignorance of the fact that you had been seriously ill here, owing to this apparition,

After your quarrel with Bernard, I was at Angers, and it was I who sent you the ring that I caused you to find in your room. This episode was due to Madame d'Ionis, who had two very old rings exactly alike, and who had previously arranged everything to carry out the romance. It was she who took it away from you during your fever, fearing that you should be too much excited by this appearance of reality, and preferring that you should think it all a dream."

"And I never thought so, never! But how did it happen that you regained possession of this ring that was not your own?"

"Caroline had given it to me," said she, blushing, "because I thought it pretty."

Then she hastened to add :

"When Bernard had won your confidence, I learned at last by what sad experiences and virtuous deeds you deserved to again behold the green lady. I then resolved to be your sister and your friend, in order to repair by the devotion of a life-time, an act of imprudence into which I had allowed myself to be drawn, and thus to compensate for the trouble I had caused you. I never expected to please you as much by daylight, as by the light of the moon. Well, since such is the case, know that you have not been the only unhappy one, and that"—

"Go on," I exclaimed, falling at her feet.

"Well, well," said she, blushing still more, and lowering her voice, although we were alone by the fountain, "know that I have been punished for my temerity. On that day I was but a merry, unthinking child, my part came very easily to me; and my *two sisters*, Bernard, and the abbé Lamyre, who were

listening behind these rocks, thought that I displayed a gravity of which they would not have deemed me capable. The truth was that in looking at you, and listening to you, I was suddenly seized with an indescribable vertigo. To begin with, I imagined that I was really dead. Destined for the cloister, I spoke to you as a being already set apart from the world of the living. I lost myself in my part, and I felt that I was becoming interested in you. You addressed me with a passion that penetrated my very soul. If you could see my face, I also could see yours—and when I reentered my convent, I feared the vows that I was about to assume, and I felt that while I had tampered with your liberty, I had yielded and lost my own.”

As she spoke thus to me, she grew animated. The shrinking modesty of her first avowal had given place to a burst of enthusiastic confidence, she entwined my head in her beautiful, long, supple arms and kissed my forehead saying :

“I had promised you solemnly that you should see me again, and I was broken-hearted when I made it, for I feared I could never keep it; and still, something divine, a voice from heaven whispered in my ear—‘Hope, for thou lovest!’”

We were united the following month. The settlement of the affairs of Madame d’Ionis (who had now become Madame d’Aillane) was not yet terminated, when the Revolution broke out, which put an end to all contesting on the part of her husband’s creditors, until a new order of things should be established. After the “Terror,” she found herself in easy circumstances, but not wealthy; I then had the joy and pride of being the sole support of my wife. The beautiful

château d'Ionis was sold, and the grounds cut up. Some peasants, blinded by a stupid patriotism, had broken the fountain, taking it for the bathing-place of a queen.

One day they brought me the head and an arm of the Naiad, which I bought of the mutilator and which I still preserve religiously. But what no one had been able to destroy, was my domestic happiness ; and what had withstood, and will continue to withstand all political tempests, unchangeable and pure, is my love for the most beautiful and best of women.

FINIS.





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The naiad; a ghost story

